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By the Same Author

GATEWAY
WAVERLY

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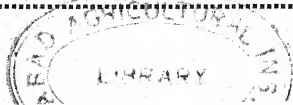
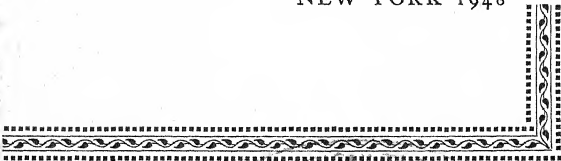


Sunnycove

AMELIA ELIZABETH WALDEN

WILLIAM MORROW AND COMPANY

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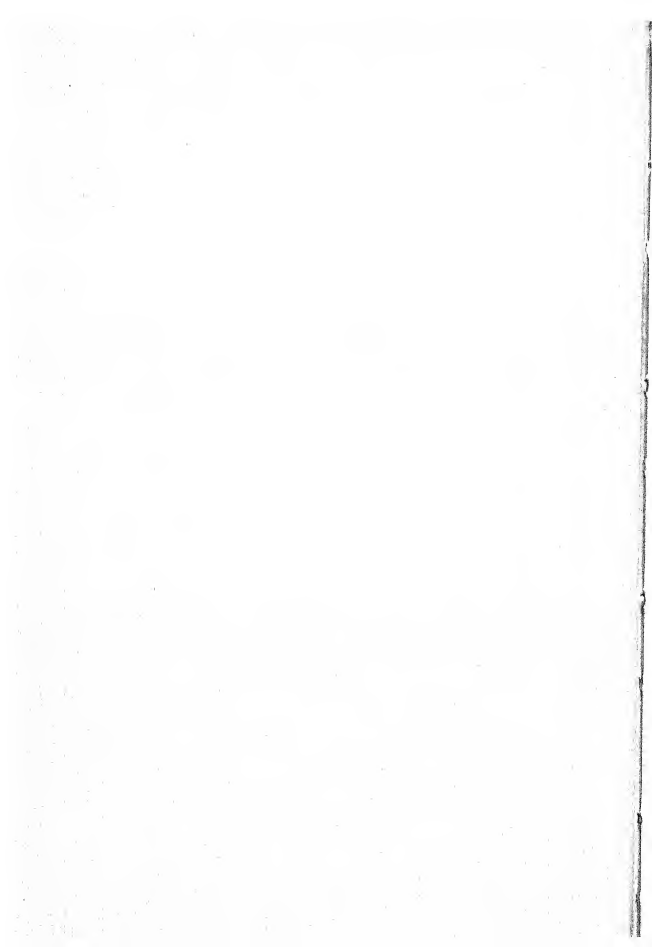
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To
Mother and Dad



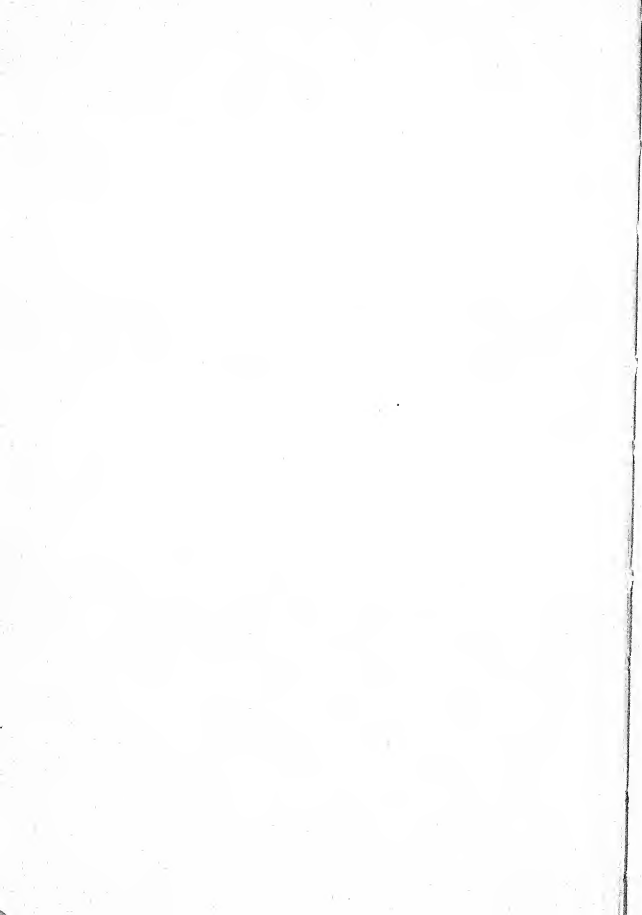


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Sunnycove

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The school bus turned off the state highway and rattled along the bumpy quarter mile toward home. Vicky gathered up her books and lunch box. She gripped the back of the seat in front of her and pulled herself up.

What am I rushing for today? she thought. Gus isn't there.

She slumped down again on the hard leather cushion. Funny, how you got into the habit of things.

Every day for four years she had been the first one to jump off the bus. Most of her classmates hardly noticed it any more. When they did, it was only to hurl a good-natured jibe after her. "Hey, Vicky, what's your hurry? Your brother's school don't have wings. It can't fly off from Pittstown."

The laughter that followed had as little effect on Vicky as the haze of smoke upon the rugged mountains that rose like scars against the sky. Closing her ears to their teasing, she would run for all she was worth past the monotonous rows of houses in the mining valley. All

that mattered was getting to the one-room school where Gus taught.

Today, however, she had purposely hung back. Now she stood at the very end of the line waiting to get off. The boys in her class crowded around the driver. They told him he'd never again carry a finer load of kids back and forth between Ridge City and Pittstown. They were showing off because they were seniors and this was the last time they'd make the ride on the school bus. Tomorrow they'd sit up on the platform in the Ridge City High School and get their diplomas. But Vicky wasn't excited. Gus had been away for three days. She was worried that he might not be back in time for graduation.

The last one to step down off the bus, she turned from the crowd and walked toward the valley. Someone called to her. It was Elsie Evans.

"Hey, Vicky," she shouted. "What's the matter? Why ain't you running hard like always? Ain't you having a lesson in being an actress today?"

"No, I'm not," said Vicky. She kept on walking but Elsie's shrill voice followed her.

"Is Gus away?"

"Yes," said Vicky.

"Where'd he go?"

Vicky, exasperated, stopped and faced her. "He went back to his college for Commencement Week," she said.

Before Elsie could think up another question, Vicky hurried on. It had rained early that afternoon and the mining town was at its hot and humid worst. The odor of burning refuse sickened her. A few miners' wives, heavy-laden with buckets, passed her on their way back

from the stream. They nodded unsmilingly. They were getting all the water they could before the stream dried up. Vicky walked fast. She was always glad when this ugly part of the town was behind her.

A freight train rattled along the track that divided the valley houses from those on the hillside. She looked up at her own home, clinging to the side of the mountain. Every day of her life she was grateful to her father for having built his own place on the hillside.

She passed the last row of drab houses and caught sight of Gus's school on the ridge. Unable to break the habit of years, she walked up the hill. Automatically she went to the old tree stump with the tiny wren house on top of it. Not a single wren had ever considered it as a possible home for her family, yet Gus stubbornly refused to remove it. "Someday we'll have our wren," he'd always say. Vicky reached inside the birdhouse and found the key to the little one-room school. She walked up the stoop and unlocked the front door. Inside she paused a moment the way she always did.

How she loved this room! Ever since she had been old enough to toddle over here, it had been her oasis in Pittstown. There welled up in her a tenderness toward every familiar object in it: the smooth brown desks which were so small she would have had trouble fitting her legs under the largest one; the slate blackboards which would never wash clean; the faded burlap on the bulletin board; the chipped green pottery pitcher which the girls filled with wildflowers in the spring; the bust of George Washington; the Spanish galleons that held up the textbooks on Gus's desk; the American flag on the platform.

It was a moment or two before she realized how close the air was in the room. Going over to the row of windows, she went down the line throwing them wide open and drawing in the pungent odors of the mining town. She loosened the collar of her blouse and rubbed the dampness from her neck with her handkerchief.

How empty the room seemed without Gus! She walked over to his desk, piled high with reports and records, and sat down in his chair. Gently she picked up the things that were there to remind her of him: his fountain pen that hadn't held any ink in years, the eyeglasses he was always too busy to put on, his worn copy of the Bible. Some people said Gus stayed in Pittstown because he liked to be a big toad in a little puddle. But that kind of talk was mostly spite and jealousy because Gus had been able to do so many things to improve the town. Gus was smart. Even those who were most jealous of him admitted it. You had to be smart to win a scholarship at the University and graduate with honors. He was strong, too. Strong enough to teach school and work in the office of the mines and run a boys' club and take a Master's degree at the same time. Vicky glowed with pride as she thought that Gus could teach English and dramatics in any high school in the state if he wanted to. At college he had been so good in dramatics that Professor Holbrook had wanted him to go on the stage. Professor Holbrook should know. He was head of the Drama Department and two of his own plays had been produced on Broadway.

Once Vicky had asked Gus why he hadn't followed Professor Holbrook's advice. She remembered the day

well. They had walked out together after he had finished giving her the daily lesson in acting. It was raining, but they both loved to walk through the rain. Suddenly she had looked up at him and said, "Gus, why didn't you go on the stage yourself?"

Gus's face was sort of shining even on that rainy day in the smoke-filled valley. He thought awhile and then said, "Because I knew I'd never be really good enough, Vicky."

She smiled to herself now as she thought of what she had said in reply. It seemed so childish. "Will I be good enough, Gus?"

Gus's face had warmed the way it did when something amused him. "You'll be the very best, Vicky," he had told her. "I wouldn't have spent all this time on you if I didn't think so."

And how much time he *had* spent! Vicky was ashamed when she thought of it. When Gus was so tired he could hardly hold up his head, he still insisted on giving her the daily lesson. Just how long ago those lessons had begun she could not remember, so long ago, in fact, that they seemed to have no beginning at all.

Even before Gus had started those lessons, she had shown the gift for mimicry, that special flair for striking at the core of an individuality and bringing it to light by a twist of the head, a turn of the hand, a flutter of the eyes, a nod, a grimace, a stance, a tone of voice. All the town characters were in her repertory: kindly Mr. Welch who worked down in the Company store; Mrs. Kimsey who had eight children and was so good-natured and untidy; Effie McGee, the town shrew; Mr. Miller

and Mr. Letts. They all came alive as Vicky reproduced them for her delighted classmates and friends.

Gus, from the depths of his own talent and education, had known how to fan that spark of ability into flame. "How lucky you are to have a brother like Gus!" Vicky's friends would say. Indeed, she was. He worked tirelessly with her. It seemed to compensate him for the stage career he would never have for himself. From childhood he worked on the way she talked. Never once was the careless speech of a mining town allowed to creep into her diction. Gus had not put her through a lot of laborious physical exercises. He had taught her to breathe naturally and spontaneously as a child does. "*Think* breath," he would say. And while he had stressed the importance of the vowels and learning perfect enunciation, he had gone much farther than this.

"It's the thought behind everything you say that counts, Vicky," he would tell her. "Be sure you know what *idea* you're going to put over. Then you'll naturally express yourself well." He would look out of the window over the drab valley. "It doesn't matter in the least where anyone comes from, Vicky," he'd say. "It's what you're thinking that counts. It gets through everything you do and say."

He had spent hours teaching her how to walk. Again he had stressed the thought quality. "Our legs aren't our masters, Vicky. They're our servants. When you enter a room or walk on the stage, never think of yourself as a little insignificant person *inside a room*. Enter in such a way that you include in your thinking every worthwhile thing in that room. Keep your thoughts off your

appearance, your physical self. Keep them on something vital and lovely. Then it won't make a bit of difference whether you're wearing a piece of dyed muslin or brocaded satin. A house dress can become a queen's robe. Remember it's how you're wearing it that counts."

Gus had taught her how to sit or stand perfectly still for ten or fifteen minutes without feeling ill at ease. "Be interested in others instead of yourself," he had told her. "That's the secret of true poise."

Above all, he had taught her how to listen. He would read her the great scenes from Shakespeare and the great dramatic passages from his Bible—Job, Kings, the Gospels. Sometimes she would read the passages back to him or they would dramatize the Shakespearian scenes together. In the cloakroom of the school was a recording machine borrowed from Professor Holbrook. Gus recorded her voice and played the records back to her. This way she had early learned to listen to herself and detect the flaws as well as the good qualities of her own voice. Even at the supper table with all the family sitting around, Gus did not hesitate to stop her if she made a mistake and make her say the word over and over again until it was perfect. Her two other brothers, who followed the mines, would laugh at them.

"How's she ever going to get a job acting?" they'd ask.

Pop would sit there in gloomy silence but Mom always said the same thing. "Gus, why you doing that? You're making Vicky think she's going to be an actress. It's not fair."

"Why isn't it fair?" he'd ask in his deep, quiet voice. "She is going to be an actress."

Mom would just look down at the red and white checked oilcloth on the table. Gus was her favorite and she didn't like to argue with him. But Vicky knew what Mom was thinking. She was thinking about Vicky's face.

Vicky pushed back Gus's chair and got up from the desk. She ran to the closet and shoved aside Gus's old hat, his work gloves, and broken umbrella. At the back lay the mirror with the jagged crack across the center. She pulled it down. Long ago she had learned how to see her whole face in spite of the crack. She looked at herself searching for some tiniest sign of beauty. Most girls had at least one thing. Large eyes or a mouth that was sweet and appealing. Or dimples, or a flash of smile that gave warmth to their face. Or hair that was thick and wavy. Or vivid coloring. The face that looked back at her had not a single one of these things. Slowly she reached up and put the mirror back. A feeling that had lain dormant within her for several months rushed to the surface and boiled over.

Gus was wrong and the others were right. How could she ever be an actress with a face like hers? Suddenly she was overwhelmed with doubt. Whenever she had brought up the subject of what would happen to her when school was over, Gus had acted evasive. If she insisted on discussing it, he would tell her not to worry and then change the subject. Could Gus have been silently agreeing with the others all this time? Did he believe that Vicky could never make good on the stage

because of her face? Was that the reason he had always put off answering her question?

There was a step on the walk. It was Gus! She could tell his step anywhere, any time. He had come back sooner than she had expected. She turned around and looked at him.

He filled the room, the way he always did the minute he came into it. "Hello, Vicky," he said. His eyes were bright and shining with news. "Vicky," he shouted as he came down the narrow aisle toward her, "I've got something to tell you. You're the first one to hear."

She braced herself for it, feeling intuitively that it was something that would carry Gus farther away from her.

"I'm going to teach in Philadelphia next year. In a high school. Speech and dramatics."

Vicky stood perfectly still. "That's fine, Gus. That's wonderful." She tried to say the words as if she meant them, but they came out choked and strained.

Then she turned and ran toward the back door. "Vicky!" His command stopped her.

He came up and grabbed her arm. "I'm sorry, Vicky. I should have told you the other news first. But because it was the best I kept it for the last."

He held her firmly by the shoulders. "You're going to the Sunnycove Playhouse, Vicky. Next week. Dr. Holbrook helped me arrange it."

She fell into his arms, burying her head against his shoulder. He shook her, trying to make her look at him. "Vicky, did you hear me? The Sunnycove Playhouse. The whole summer. They'll have Broadway producers there. And professional actors and actresses. A real di-

rector. And you'll be seen, Vicky. The whole world is going to find out what I've always known. That you're going to be a great actress."

She looked up at him. Most people would probably have called his face homely, with its prominent nose and sharp, pointed chin, but she loved it. She tried to say something. It was too much to have happen all at once. Only five minutes ago she had been doubting him, thinking he didn't believe in her. While all the time he had been hurrying here to tell her this marvelous news. So that's why he had gone up to the University right after school closed!

"Oh, Gus! Gus!" It was all she could say. He let go of her and she walked to the window. He came over and stood beside her. They looked out at the valley huddled against its bleak mountain backdrop. The air was thick with smoke from three hundred coke ovens. Her eyes followed the ugly piles of slate and refuse which had been dumped along the base of the mountain.

"Gus," she said, "I'm scared."

"What about?"

"Being away from you, for one thing." He put his arm around her shoulder as if to say he'd always be there, no matter how far away from each other they were.

Then because she couldn't help herself, she asked the question. "Gus, do you think it will make very much difference that I'm not pretty?" She did not look at him because she dreaded seeing the answer in his face. She knew that whatever it was, it would be an honest one. Gus couldn't lie to her.

He turned her toward him and his quiet brown eyes were filled with surprise as if the idea had never occurred to him. "Vicky," he said, "I don't know what beauty is if it's not something that's inside a person, that sort of shines through everything they say and do. A pretty face couldn't add anything to that kind of beauty. And not having one couldn't take anything from it."

She twisted the cord of the window shade between her fingers. "But producers and directors! How are they going to know about the kind of beauty that's inside you?"

"The people who matter will always know," he said. "The others don't count, Vicky."

Vicky put down her suitcase and watched the last car disappear down the track. The little railroad station was deserted. Yet the letter from the Sunnycove Theater management had clearly stated that a Mr. Strawbridge would meet her at the train.

Her new hat chafed her forehead and she impatiently pulled it off. She walked over to the buff-colored building and opened the door. Billows of warm air surged out and settled oppressively over her. The ticket window was closed. Outside again, she looked around her, wondering what to do. She could walk down the road and ask at the first house how to get to Skipper's Inn. But how could she walk several miles and carry her bag in all this heat?

A wave of disappointment swept over her. She had sat up all night in a day coach and this morning she had bought only a sugar bun and a glass of milk in the Grand Central where she had caught the train for Sunnycove. She was hot and sticky and tired and hungry. Now,

added to everything else, this Mr. Strawbridge had not turned up to meet her.

A train whistled in the distance and a family of crows made noisy foraging trips back and forth above the station.

A car scraped along the road and came to an abrupt stop. Vicky hurried to the end of the platform and watched a large man climb out of a station wagon. He came over to her, pushing his shapeless Panama back on his head and mopping his forehead with a red handkerchief.

"You Miss Victoria Lind?" he asked. His blue shirt, damp with perspiration, clung to him.

"Yes," she said.

Mr. Strawbridge sized her up in a sweeping glance more comical than offensive. Then he jerked a thumb toward her luggage. "That all you brought?" He snapped his bright green suspenders.

"Yes," she said.

He picked up her bag and led the way to the station wagon. "Kind of unusual for stage folks," he said. His lazy voice, up in his nose where it shouldn't be, belied the swiftness of his movements. "They like to bring all they got."

It was on the tip of Vicky's tongue to say, "I brought all I've got," but she checked herself in time. Watching Mr. Strawbridge shove her bag into the station wagon, she asked, "Do we pass the theater on the way to the Inn?"

"Shove over there," he pointed. "It's on the left-hand side."

She thought, These Yankees certainly don't waste any words. She climbed in and he started the car. They swung down the hill toward the town. It was beautiful. Suddenly her heart sang above heat and hunger as she watched the clean white farmhouses. Everything was so fresh and lovely! Even the big barns were newly painted. She thought, It certainly seems funny to ride along a road that isn't marred by refuse and soot from the mines. They passed a bright spot of color and she called out, "What's that?"

Mr. Strawbridge glanced where she pointed. "Wesley Dibble's old-fashioned garden."

"It's lovely. I've never seen anything like it in my life."

Mr. Strawbridge watched her in the mirror. "You live in a big city?"

"No." She might as well tell him. "In a West Virginia mining town."

Mr. Strawbridge looked in the mirror again and she could feel his thoughts putting together the things about her that had puzzled him—the kind of clothes she wore, the inexpensive suitcase.

A chicken ran across the road and Mr. Strawbridge turned aside, muttering, "Darn thing wants its feathers trimmed." A sign beside the road warned, "Sunnycove. Drive slow. Thickly settled."

They passed several large houses with broad lawns and pillared porches. Then all at once she saw it. "There!" she cried. "There it is!" She leaned forward and breathlessly asked, "Would you mind pulling over so I can have a good look at it?"

Mr. Strawbridge obligingly swung toward the curb. Vicky stared at the big red barn on the other side of the road. She did not need the large sign, *Sunnycove Playhouse*, to identify it. It was exactly like the photographs she'd cut from magazines and pasted in her scrapbook.

"Is that yellow building next to it the student workshop?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

Vicky got out. "Mind if I run over and look at it?" Mr. Strawbridge shook his head. She walked across the road, thinking, I can hardly believe I'm here at last. But there were all the famous landmarks she had read about. First, the old well around which celebrities gathered between the acts. She ran up, poked her head under the shed, and looked down. It was covered with boards. She went over to the cowbell that summoned the crowds to return to their seats after intermissions. The clapper was wound about with cloth. Reaching up, she gave the cord a pull and it swayed noiselessly back and forth. Around at the side stood the covered wagon which served as a refreshment stand, its canvas sides blinding white in the hot sun.

She walked down the path and stood before the billboard which announced the plays for the coming season. Three of them would star Gloria Fenton and three, Sybil Shaw. Several times Gus had taken Vicky to see stock companies, but she had never seen a Broadway star. She thought, Imagine spending the whole summer so close to two of them.

Her eyes ran down the billboard and paused before "All My Life," starring Gloria Fenton. It was one of the

plays that had made the actress famous. It was silly, but Vicky could not resist the temptation to insert her own name mentally where Gloria Fenton's was. Victoria Lind in "All My Life." She looked down at her skirt, wrinkled from the long train ride, and the wilted dimity blouse. Her shoes were seconds, bought in a store patronized by miners' families. She thought, Maybe I'm being silly, but some day some other girl may stand here just like this and see my name on the Sunnycove billboard.

Mr. Strawbridge honked the horn and she hurried back to the car. "Hot here in the sun," he explained.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"Got two girls who are stage-struck. Always reading movie magazines." He pulled away from the curb. "Guess the world's divided into two kinds of girls. Them that are actresses and them that wish they could be."

He turned the station wagon down a narrow winding street. "Captain's Lane," he announced. "In the old days every house was owned by a sea captain."

Vicky looked eagerly from one trim-looking house to another. "I know. Sunnycove was famous for its shipping, wasn't it?"

"Yup." Mr. Strawbridge pushed his Panama back with an expansive gesture. "When I was a lad, we used to say wherever you stood in Sunnycove if you chucked a stone you'd hit a sea captain."

"Are there any of them still living here?"

"Yup. Two or three."

Vicky leaned forward. "Is that the Connecticut River at the end of the street?"

"Sure is."

Mr. Strawbridge swung into a driveway past a large sign with a picture of a four-masted schooner and "Skipper's Inn" painted in bold black letters. He stopped in a parking space behind the big white clapboard building.

"I'll take this in the back way," he said, pulling out her bag. "You go around to the front door and find Miss Penelope Sniff."

She got out and looked at the Inn. Two girls in vivid playsuits sprawled in chairs on the wide lawn. One of the girls was a striking blonde with hair a rare shade of pale gold. They both glanced curiously over at Vicky.

Conscious of her rumpled clothes, she started across the lawn, feeling the girls' eyes piercing through her. When she reached them she glanced over and smiled. Both girls turned blank stares on her.

"Who is she?" asked the dark one. "One of the students?"

The blonde girl said, "Heavens, no! She can't be. Probably just a new waitress."

Vicky thought, I wish I had been able to tidy up a bit. I wonder if Miss Penelope Sniff will take me for a waitress too.

Inside the Inn it was cool and dark, with that musty smell belonging to old houses. The odor of freshly-baked bread filled the lower hallway. Vicky longed for just one mouthful. As she walked down the hall, the broad floor boards creaked beneath her feet. The office door was open and she stepped into a room partly darkened against the late afternoon sun.



Although it was empty, you could feel the personality of its owner. The low oval chairs with their prim antimacassars might have been lifted from a parlor of the last century. Yet a modern note was struck in the room by the Venetian blinds, the tailored draperies, the streamlined armchair, the metal filing cases, and the typewriter which stood ready for business on the desk. The walls were almost completely covered with theatrical photographs. Vicky walked over and read the autographs. Margo Le Blanc, Miles Towart, Richard Hammond, Nola Gibbs. Over the desk was the largest photograph of all. It was Gloria Fenton's and it said, "To my dear friend and mentor of my student days at Sunnycove, Penelope Sniff, With love, Gloria." Vicky thought, Why, all these people studied right here at Sunnycove. They may even have stood in this very spot and waited for Miss Sniff.

"Hello." The voice was crisp and precise. Vicky turned and faced a tiny woman, slender and straight, who looked at her from merry blue eyes. "You're Victoria Lind," she said in a cheerful voice that bubbled over like carbonated water. "And you've come all the way from West Virginia. And the first thing you want is a glass of milk and a slice of fresh, home-baked bread with lots of butter and then you want a bath and a rest before dinner."

Vicky could have thrown her arms around Miss Penelope Sniff. She went into the kitchen herself and brought back a tray with three thick slices of bread and a tall glass filled with milk. While Vicky sat on one of the oval chairs and ate, Miss Sniff's lively eyes seemed to be

taking mental notes about her. When she had finished, Miss Sniff took the tray and said, "I'll have to ask you to fill out a card for my files." She gave Vicky a printed form. Vicky sat at the desk and filled in her age, her address, her father's and mother's names, and where she was born. She handed the card to Miss Sniff, who asked, "Is Victoria Lind your real name or the one you intend to use on the stage?"

"It's my real name," said Vicky.

"Then may I have your stage name for the records?"

"I'm going to use my own name for the stage."

Miss Sniff's merry eyes widened with surprise. "I've kept this home for students for seventeen years," she said, "and you're the first girl I've had who didn't change at least one of her names."

Vicky got up. "If I can't make good, a different name won't help me. If I can, the name won't make much difference."

Miss Sniff's small head with its halo of white curls bobbed in vigorous approval. "Your name is pretty anyway," she said. "And what's more, your thinking is sound. I'm glad of that. Because if you're going on the stage you'll need common sense." She waved her hand toward the photograph of Gloria Fenton. "There's a girl who has common sense. When she first came here, she had a poor voice that wouldn't carry beyond the third row. She was awkward, too, and frightened. But she had staying power. Now she's one of the finest dramatic actresses in the country."

"I know," said Vicky. "I've read about her."

Miss Sniff filed away Vicky's card and said, "I'll take

you to your room now." She led the way up the front stairs and down the winding corridors of the Inn. They turned a corner and Miss Sniff opened a door. "This is your room," she said. She nodded to the left. "The bath's just two doors down."

"May I take a bath every day?" asked Vicky.

"Why, of course." Miss Sniff sounded surprised.

Vicky thought, She's so understanding, I know I can tell her. She said, "They don't have running water in the houses in mining towns."

"Bless your heart!" said Miss Sniff. "Well, you just go ahead and take as many baths as you like."

Vicky looked around the simply furnished room with its pine bed and bureau, its writing table and two straight-backed chairs. Three small braided rugs partly covered the broad floor boards. Everything was spotlessly clean. She said, "It will be wonderful to live in a room where there isn't a speck of soot. The mines ruin everything at home."

Miss Sniff straightened the runner on the bureau. "I hope the mirror's large enough."

"It's big enough for me," said Vicky.

Miss Sniff smoothed a few wrinkles from the candlewick bedspread. "I ask all the girls not to put up any fancy electric fixtures for their make-up. There's a make-up room at the workshop for that. Two summers ago one of the girls burned three 200-watt bulbs all day long."

"I understand," said Vicky.

"The bulletin board in the front hall tells about rehearsal calls and other rules," Miss Sniff explained. "I

keep the rules few and simple so they'll be obeyed. Students are expected to be in their rooms by midnight unless they have special permission to stay out later." Miss Sniff went to the window and pointed up the street. "The boy students live in that little cottage with the blue shutters. They have their meals here at the Inn and I'm glad to have them visit on the lawn or in the parlor, but they're not to come upstairs."

Vicky smiled. "I won't break the rules."

"I know it," said Miss Sniff, looking frankly into her eyes. "I taught school for years. It's pretty hard to fool me about the character of a girl."

"What time do you have supper?" asked Vicky.

"We have lunch at noon and dinner at six sharp," said Miss Sniff, "so the boys can get over to the theater and help with the scenery. Most of them are working their way on scholarships." She went to the door. "We're having fried chicken and gingerbread tonight. I hope you're not dieting like some of the girls."

"Not me!"

"Good," said Miss Sniff. She started to leave and turned back. "If you get lonesome the first few days, you come down and listen to the radio in my sitting room. I know what it means to be away from home. I almost cried my eyes out the first year I taught school." She closed the door and went down the hall.

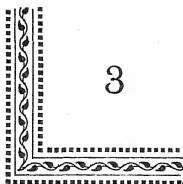
Vicky went over to the window and looked across the street at the red brick and white clapboard houses that had once belonged to the sea captains. They were shoved up close to the street, with narrow borders of bright green grass. She thought, They look like inquisi-

tive housewives that don't want to miss a thing. If she pressed her nose against the copper screen, she could catch a glimpse of the Connecticut River. Sunnycove was prettier than she had imagined any town could be. It was hard for her to realize that she was really going to spend two months in all this cleanness and freshness.

Gay voices and laughing broke the stillness of the summer afternoon. She craned her neck and saw some young people playing badminton on the side lawn. They were probably students. At supper—no, she must remember to call it dinner—she'd meet them. She thought, I hope they're not as unfriendly as the girls on the lawn.

Now that she had had something to eat she was able to smile over their remark. It was amusing that they should have taken her for a waitress. She'd tell Gus about it in her first letter. He'd throw back his head and laugh the way she loved to hear him. She'd tell him, too, that she could have as many baths as she liked every day.

She opened the closet and found a large bath towel hanging there. On the bureau was a fresh cake of soap in a bright yellow tray. For the first time in her life she was going to enjoy a real bath in a real bathtub with all the water she wanted. Humming a little, she opened her suitcase and pulled out her new bathrobe. No one would have to look very closely to see that the material was two different shades of blue. But she put it on and said aloud, "All right, Vicky Lind, suppose it is a seconds like most of your clothes. You've still got more to be grateful for than any ten other girls. Don't you forget it for one moment."



As she stood before the mirror, Vicky could not help thinking that Gus would have approved of her tonight. Her dress was a flowered print with lots of red in it and a wide skirt. It was the only real dress she had brought with her, the sole article in her scant wardrobe that had not come from the "seconds" store. She was grateful that her figure was good and, thanks to Gus, her posture was perfect. She thought, I need something to hide the fact that my permanent wave is a home one. Breaking a spray of red roses from the bouquet on the desk, she pinned it in her hair.

As long as she could, she deliberately avoided looking at her face. It was a habit she had developed in childhood when her playmates, with the cruel frankness of children, would say, "You aren't pretty, Vicky." In one form or another she'd heard the comment all her life. "Vicky's nice and lots of fun, but her face is awfully plain." She thought, I hope it won't make too much difference with the other students.

For a moment she listened to the girls' voices and foot-

steps as they went downstairs to dinner. Her heart beat a little faster. She opened the door and found her way down through the maze of corridors.

At the foot of the stairs stood Miss Sniff in a white taffeta dress that gave an important rustle to her quick movements. "The front dining room is for guests," she said. "The porch at the back is for you students. Josie expects you."

Josie's eyes were warm and cordial as she greeted Vicky and led her to a table where three other girls were seated.

"This is Victoria Lind," she said with a smile. She nodded to each of the other girls as she spoke their names. "Donna Russell, Cheri Weston and Joan Scott." Joan, petite with pretty features, drawled a pleasant "How do you do." The two other girls were the ones Vicky had seen on the lawn. They nodded coldly as Vicky said, "Hello." Cheri was a large, handsome brunette with a petulant mouth and a deep furrow between her brooding eyes. Donna was the attractive blonde who had made the remark about Vicky's being a waitress. Vicky sat down across from her, and Donna's large, violet-blue eyes picked her face apart, feature by feature.

While they ate their soup, Donna and Cheri chatted about swimming at White Sands Beach. Vicky watched Donna with interest. There was in her a kind of driving force which showed in her nervous gestures, her restless eyes, and the impatience with which she waited for the waitress to serve them. Among Vicky's Slovak friends in the valley at Pittstown she had seen those triangular faces marked by prominent bone structure.

"Where do you come from?" It was Donna's voice. Vicky looked up to be sure the question had been asked of her.

"Pittstown," she said.

Donna caught the word. "Pittstown. Where's that?"

"West Virginia."

Cheri woke from her boredom and leaned across the table. "Why, that's a coal-mining camp." Vicky turned from Donna to Cheri. "My father has a journalist friend who lived down there a whole month and did a story about it for his magazine. Complete with illustrations."

Donna's eyes were narrow with curiosity. "Is your father a coal miner?"

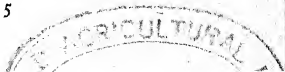
Vicky thought, Well, what of it? I'm not ashamed of my people or where I come from. Her head was high with pride and there was a touch of defiance in her voice as she answered, "Yes, he was, before his legs gave out. And I have two brothers who follow the mines."

Cheri snorted. "It's dreadful work," she said. "Crawling around in pools of water on your hands and knees miles under the earth. And the living conditions are simply ghastly. Why, there were pigs trying to squeeze through the back door of one of the houses in the picture."

Vicky felt herself flush. "Some of the families in the valley do keep pigs. We live up on the hill."

"What's the difference?" asked Donna.

Vicky thought, How can I explain to you when you've never even seen a mining town? She said, "Up on the hill the people own their own houses instead of rent-



ing them from the companies. We try to fix our homes up. And we keep them as clean as we can."

Cheri snorted again. "I should think that would be pretty hard. Why, there isn't even running water in the houses!" she said scornfully.

Vicky turned back to her plate but found that the chicken and potatoes and fresh green peas didn't look as appetizing as they had before.

Donna's voice was sharp and compelling as she asked the next question. "How in the world did you ever happen to come here to Sunnycove?"

Vicky felt like a squirrel cornered by a couple of tormenting dogs.

She said quietly, "One of my brothers is a school-teacher. He's always believed I should be an actress and he's gone to a great deal of trouble to help me. It's because of him that I'm here this summer."

"I think that's awfully nice." It was the first comment Joan Scott had offered. She smiled at Vicky and it eased the tension for a moment.

However, Donna followed up the remark with another question. "I suppose you played the lead in high school plays?" she asked tauntingly.

Vicky answered as calmly as she could. "As a matter of fact, I did."

Donna pressed down the corners of her heavily made-up mouth. "And I suppose you hope to get a part in one of the professional plays and go to Broadway this fall and become a great actress?"

Vicky looked calmly into Donna's eyes. "That's what we're all hoping for, isn't it?"

Donna waved her fork under Vicky's nose. "Little girl, you just relax and have a good time this summer. You won't get any part in a Broadway play. People used to believe if you got up early and worked hard you'd be a success. That's not the way things happen in the theater. It's a tough, hard business and you've got to have plenty on the ball. But even then you've got to know the right people. The theater," she pronounced the word mockingly, "is a closed door to all but the favored few. The money's in Hollywood, my innocent. That's where I'm heading. So if you really want to get away from your mining camp, you'd better change your tactics." Donna's eyes turned like a photographic lens upon every curve and angle of Vicky's face. "Of course, you've got to have features that will photograph well," she finished.

The four girls were silent as the waitress removed their dinner plates and placed before them squares of gingerbread topped with whipped cream.

Donna pushed her dessert away. "None of that for me." Cheri refused it, too. Donna noisily shoved back her chair and stood up. She pulled her purple velvet slacks up about her yellow-green sport shirt. With her head thrown back and her shoulders squared, she had the insolent stance of a prize fighter. Briefly her eyes held Vicky's. Then she signaled imperiously to Cheri. They went over to one of the tables at which the boys were sitting. Two of them got up and walked out into the hall with Donna and Cheri.

Vicky ate her gingerbread but she didn't taste it. She wondered what Joan Scott was thinking. To cover her embarrassment, Vicky let her eyes wander about the

room. Most of the tables were empty by now. Slanting rays of sunlight poured through the glassed-in porch and lighted up the mellow orange tones of the maple chairs and tables and shot iridescent lights through the blue glass dishes.

At last Joan put down her napkin and said, "Donna Russell's quite a girl, isn't she?"

"She's very beautiful," said Vicky.

Joan nodded and said in the soft drawl that accentuated her smallness and femininity, "That boy she went out with, the bushy-haired one with the glasses, is Mark Forgan. His father's connected with New Century, the movie company."

"Who's the other boy?"

"Jack Trent. New Century sent him here this summer to learn how to act. If he makes good, he'll get a contract in the fall."

"Even if I could get into the movies," said Vicky, "I'd prefer the stage."

"I haven't any real talent for either," Joan said shyly. "But I've always had the stage in my system and I thought this summer at Sunnycove would help me get over it." She smiled. "Then maybe I'll be content to go back home to Mobile, Alabama, and get a job and settle down."

Vicky folded her napkin and pushed it through the napkin ring at her place. "Not me," she said. "I've got to get somewhere with my acting this summer or I could never face Gus again."

"Is Gus the brother who's helping you?"

Vicky nodded.

Joan thoughtfully rearranged the poppies and the purplish-blue delphinium in the white pottery bowl on the table. Suddenly she pushed her chair closer to Vicky and spoke in confidential tones. "I think I should warn you about Donna Russell. She's sort of a ringleader among the students. It's partly because of her push. And she's so perfectly beautiful that most of the boys are ready to jump if she just looks at them."

"She seems to have very nice clothes," said Vicky.

"She earned enough by modeling to outfit herself and pay her way here. She hopes she'll get a part in a professional play and a movie scout will spot her. She's older than the rest of us. And she figures if she doesn't get her chance in the movies soon, it will be too late."

Josie watched them as she cleaned off the other tables. Vicky pushed back her chair. "I should think Donna would stand a good chance. She'd screen well."

"Yes, she would."

Joan and Vicky got up. They walked out into the hallway and stopped by the bulletin board. The clattering of dishes from the kitchen followed them and mingled with the low rumble of voices in the front dining room. Through the screen door, Vicky caught sight of Donna Russell in her bright purple slacks and yellow-green shirt. Most of the other students were gathered around her. Her laugh rang out above the bass voices of the boys.

Vicky read the notices on the bulletin board: Miss Sniff's list of rules, another set of rules from the theater management, and a brief notice stating that students would meet for organization and classes at nine o'clock

tomorrow in the workshop barn. She turned to Joan and said, "I get excited just at the thought of going into the workshop."

Joan nodded understandingly.

Then suddenly Donna's voice sailed back into the hallway and drowned out every other sound. "She said they lived on a hill and they tried to fix up their homes, to keep them clean. Imagine! They haven't even got running water in their houses."

A deep voice asked a question which Vicky didn't catch and Donna replied, "Oh, I suppose she thinks she'll get a break here this summer. You know, success story stuff." She laughed. "I can't help wondering if she ever looks in the mirror. When you get a chance, take a look at her face."

Vicky found it hard to believe that she had actually heard the words, but Donna had said them. There was no mistake about it. She churned with fear and anger. Not that she wasn't used to hearing remarks about her face. It was just the cold-blooded way Donna went about it, turning the others against her because of her home and her looks even before they really knew her.

She felt Joan's hand on her arm. "Let's go out the back way and take a walk before it gets dark."

"No," said Vicky. "I'm tired. I didn't sleep on the train last night."

Leaving Joan in the hallway, she walked slowly up the stairs to her room. She sat in one of the straight-backed chairs, thinking about what Donna had said. Although she was exhausted from her trip, she wasn't sleepy. Her mind was too full. It was full of loneliness, for one thing,

loneliness for Gus. If he were here, she could have talked it all over with him. He would have known exactly what to say to help her. For a long time she sat there, feeling miserable. The sun went down and in the afterglow she listened to the calls of the birds as they got settled for the night. The poignantly beautiful song of a wood thrush dominated them all and made a kind of running melody for her thoughts.

I could go to the Sunnycove management and ask for my money back, she thought. I could tell them I feel I'd be wasting my time here.

For a long time she sat there, considering it. Toward midnight a thunderstorm broke. Standing by the window, Vicky watched the vivid gold flashes of lightning cut across the black sky and listened to the crackling and rumbling through the valley of the Connecticut River.

A car stopped in front of the Inn, spilling its headlights on the wet dark surface of the road. Two girls got out and ran up the walk. They laughed and screamed. Vicky listened to the sharp pelting of the rain on the newspapers they held over their heads. In a flash of lightning she recognized Donna and Cheri. The car turned around and went up the street.

She stood there a while longer, smelling the freshness of the air after the rain and watching the houses across the street turn pale lavender in the weak flashes of lightning that straggled in the wake of the storm. A cat ran across the road and scooted up on a porch. He miaowed coaxingly. Someone opened a door and let him in.

Vicky left the window and went over to the lamp that hung above her bureau. She turned it on. Under the

S U N N Y C O V E

unflattering arc of yellow light her face stared back at her from the mirror. Tomorrow she had to go over to the workshop and meet the other students. Donna's words thundered louder than the last rumbling claps of thunder outside. *When you get a chance, take a look at her face. When you get a chance, take a look at her face.*

Vicky slipped quietly into the workshop barn and sat down on one of the rear benches next to Joan Scott. The other students arrived by twos or threes. Donna was the last to come in. Dressed in a long yellow and red dirndl, she wore heavy gold loops in her ears. If it were not for her pale hair, she would have looked like a gypsy who had wandered away from her tribe.

But there were more interesting things to look at than Donna. Although the workshop was much smaller than the Sunnycove Playhouse, it was a complete theater in itself. The old floor boards had been painted dark green to match the small stage at the front. Rows of yellow benches filled the open floor space, eked out by an assortment of rockers and armchairs which had undoubtedly been gathered from Sunnycove attics. Flats and rolls of extra canvas were piled against the wall, and an old upright piano stood in one corner of the room.

The stage itself was the most interesting spot of all. An interior set had been struck and shoved against the wall and the baize had been rolled back. Several spot-

lights stood around. Off stage there was a row of six or seven floodlights, their rainbow-colored gelatins sparkling in a ray of sunlight that poured upon the stage. Furniture and properties were scattered everywhere: chairs and tables, a fireplace, two short flights of steps, a bundle of artificial logs, picture frames, and an odd collection of knickknacks.

"Isn't it fascinating?" It was Joan's soft southern voice bringing Vicky back to earth.

"Yes," said Vicky. "It's the first time I've ever been so close to a real theater. At High, we were glad if we had a decent set and footlights."

Joan leaned over. "There's Mr. Litchfield, our student director."

Vicky looked up at a tall, slender man in slacks and a yellow sport shirt open at the throat. His wavy pompadour was sprinkled with gray.

"He looks easygoing," whispered Joan. "But they say he's full of pep."

Mr. Litchfield smiled casually at them. "Hello, everybody," he said. "I think we're going to have a lot of fun this summer. That is, if you don't mind hard work." One of the boys groaned, but Mr. Litchfield went on calmly. "So that we may know each other better, I'd like each one of you to introduce yourself. Tell us where you come from and why you're here."

Vicky listened with interest as each girl stood up. There were six others besides Cheri Weston, Donna, Joan, and herself. Enid Cooper was English, and she told how she had done a bit of stock acting at home and hoped to return and start a professional group of her

own. Then there were Susan Howard and Hope Esmond, graduates of the American Academy, who looked forward to a try at Broadway after a summer in the workshop. They seemed intense and eager. Joan whispered to Vicky, "They'll work like dogs, take any job that's given them, and not have a sensitive hair in their heads. That's what the American Academy does for you."

Renee Larue, a Canadian, was a singer who wanted to do musical comedy and operettas. Joy Wilson and Bette Lee were, like Vicky, just out of high school.

"They're awfully friendly with Donna," Joan commented.

There were eight boys in the group. Mark Forgan and Jack Trent who had gone out with Donna and Cheri last night introduced themselves first. Then a short boy stood up. His homely face was peppered with freckles and topped by sandy hair. "I'm Goodloe Buffum," he said. A few of the students laughed. "Believe it or not, it's my own name. Everyone calls me Buff and I hope you will, too." This time they all laughed. It wasn't so much what he'd said as the way he said it.

Joan turned to Vicky and said, "He certainly is funny. This morning before you got here, Mr. Litchfield asked him to move some of the furniture and he stumbled and fell into the paint cans."

Vicky looked at Goodloe Buffum's trousers. They were smeared with four or five different colors of paint.

A quiet boy who stood up next introduced himself as Leslie Gray. In a serious voice he said that he intended to be a playwright and direct his own plays. "I'm here

this summer to get the background essential for my writing."

"He looks as if he could do it, too," said Joan.

The next boy was Eric Mann, handsome, poised, speaking in a voice which Vicky recognized had been trained for the stage. "I came here to learn how to act," he said.

Walter Gibbs was a tall, lanky boy who looked as if he had strayed in from a neighboring cornfield. His voice was high and weak. When Mr. Litchfield asked him why he had come to Sunnycove, he said he'd been working for a lawyer in the theatrical district and one day a client came in and told him about Sunnycove and asked how he'd like to come up here for the summer. He said he thought it would be a nice change from law books and taking care of petty cash. "I can't act, but I've got enough muscle to use a hammer and a saw making scenery. And when I go back, I ought to be able to get along better with our clients."

Frank Fowler was a large, stout young man with a heavy head of hair, strong features, and a deep voice. "I want to be a villain," he said in such loud, resounding tones that Vicky and Joan nudged each other and stifled a giggle.

Finally there was Norman Tonnelly, a boy with a sharp, pointed face. He said he was especially interested in stagecraft.

"He's a pest," commented Joan. "He clings to Mr. Litchfield like a burr and asks a hundred silly questions every minute."

Mr. Litchfield said, "Well, now we're all acquainted." He turned around and looked at the stage. "First, you

ought to know that we've got a real theater right here and we're proud of it. We can fly two sets, we have a full switchboard and plenty of lights, a property room at the back, and two large dressing rooms." He smiled at the girls. "With good mirrors and lots of light, too." A few of them applauded. "We've also got a wardrobe room with a complete stock of costumes. You're welcome to go in and look it over at your leisure."

He went on to explain about their daily schedule. From nine until eleven they would have classes in pantomime, speech, and make-up with Miss Dyson, the other instructor of the group. From eleven until one they would have direction and stagecraft with Mr. Litchfield. Some afternoons they would be expected to rehearse for parts in their workshop plays which would be given every other week before small audiences of Sunnycove townspeople.

"How do we get a part in the professional plays?" Everyone turned toward Donna as she asked the question.

Mr. Litchfield took his time about answering. He finally said, "There will be very few parts for students in the professional plays. Only when the professional company runs short of actors."

"How do we try out for them?" asked Donna.

"Try-outs won't be necessary. I'll select the students whom I think best suited for the parts."

Joan leaned sideways and spoke from the corner of her mouth to Vicky. "I can see her making a mental note to be especially nice to Mr. Litchfield."

"And now," said Mr. Litchfield, "I think we'll cast our first workshop play."

There were excited whisperings among the group. "What do you suppose it will be?" "Will we all get a part?" "How's he going to cast it?"

Mr. Litchfield went over to a closet behind the piano and brought back a handful of play books. "Let's make a circle over here by the window," he said. "I've chosen a play with a large cast for our first one so you'll all have a chance to act." He handed the books to Goodloe Buffum. "Pass them out, Buff, will you?"

Vicky thought, He's friendly. I like the way he talks.

She eagerly accepted the book and bent her head over it. The title was "Paris, Good-by."

Mr. Litchfield went on to explain the plot and characters. "It's about Janet Higgins, an American girl from Iowa who goes to Paris to study and falls in love with a young French diplomat. She has a thrilling time getting all mixed up in international intrigue. We'll cast the leads first." He looked over the boys. "Eric Mann, will you read the part of Paul, the hero, please?"

"I'd like to try the part of Janet Higgins." It was Donna again.

Mr. Litchfield hesitated a moment and then said, "All right." He perched on the broad arm of a comfortable chair. "We'll do the scene on the terrace in the last act. It's got a strong emotional pull. Janet and Paul are standing on a balcony overlooking the port where the boat lies that will carry Janet home to America. It's their moment of good-by." He smiled at them. "I'm sorry to say, it is good-by forever."

Donna and Eric began to read. Vicky sat forward and listened. Eric was good. She thought, He's got a fine feeling for the part and a nice restrained quality.

"Isn't Donna awful?" It was Joan whispering to her again. Vicky had been so interested in Eric that she hadn't paid much attention to Donna's reading. Now she listened to it. Joan was right. Of course, you couldn't always tell from a first reading, but even so it was obvious Donna had no idea of how to get inside the character. She overemphasized the lines, giving too much emotion to every speech. She saved nothing for the climax and, like most amateurs, she hit every pronoun hard.

When they finished the scene Mr. Litchfield passed without comment to the next couple, Jack Trent and Joan. Jack was passable but he lacked the ease and self-possession of Eric Mann. Joan, with her southern drawl, could never have hailed from Iowa. Mr. Litchfield methodically went around the group, giving everyone a chance. Most of the students had already cast themselves to type and could not fit easily into the straight romantic roles of Janet and Paul. Goodloe Buffum read with Cheri Weston. He gave the lines such a humorous twist that Cheri started laughing and they couldn't finish the scene. Frank Fowler and Enid Cooper were almost as comical. Frank's reading was heavy, almost sinister, and Enid's cool, British manner was certainly not characteristic of the thoroughly American Janet Higgins. Susan Howard and Hope Esmond both did well, showing the careful training they had received at dramatic school. However, when they were finished, Joan turned to

Vicky and said, "They're good, but they're trying too hard."

Vicky was one of the last to be called on. Since Mr. Litchfield had run out of boys, he asked Eric Mann to read the part of Paul again. By now the group was bored and restless from the frequent repetitions of the scene. But Vicky was not disturbed by their uneasiness. She could almost hear Gus's voice, authoritative from his years of teaching, say to her, "Feel it to the very core of your being and then want to share it with others so badly you'll burst if you don't." She shut out everything around her and became Janet Higgins. She read her first line.

The moment she spoke the students quieted down and listened. Vicky forgot about the workshop and the other students. She kept her eyes on Eric's earnest face, responding to his every mood and tone. When they finished the scene Vicky sat back in her chair. Then she glanced at the others for the first time. Every face was turned toward her. The whining cry of a catbird just outside the door pierced the stillness.

Mr. Litchfield got up from the arm of the chair and said quietly, "You read the lines extraordinarily well. Where have you studied, Miss Lind?"

"With my brother," she said. "My brother Gus." The others stared at her as if they were amused at her naive reply. She thought, They don't believe me.

The catbird whined again. Mr. Litchfield looked out the window as if he were trying to see the bird. Suddenly he turned around and said, "I'd like Miss Lind to play the part of Janet Higgins and Eric Mann, the part

of Paul." There were a few disappointed grumbles from the group. Mr. Litchfield said, "You'll all be very busy these first few weeks and while I'm sure others of you could work into the leads just as well as Miss Lind and Mr. Mann, I think they'll be quick studies." He went down the list of characters and cast the rest of the parts. Vicky noticed that he gave rather good ones to Susan Howard and Hope Esmond, showing that he had recognized their training. Donna Russell was given one of the minor parts. She turned to Cheri and mumbled something Vicky couldn't hear.

Mr. Litchfield tossed his book into the seat of the arm-chair and said, "That's all for today. The afternoon's all your own. Tomorrow I'll start directing you in 'Paris, Good-by.' Then you can break up into groups and rehearse different scenes on your own in the afternoon."

The students got up and moved their chairs back into place. Some of them went over to talk to Mr. Litchfield.

Joan said to Vicky, "Let's go up and have a look at the stage." Norman Tonnerly was poking around among the properties and scenery. He started a lengthy explanation of the way the lights worked. Joan whispered to Vicky, "We'd better make a break. If we don't, he'll hang on to our ears the rest of the morning."

When they left the workshop, Vicky said, "Let's stand here a moment."

"Why?" asked Joan.

"Because I can't get used to so much green all around me," said Vicky. "The sky's so blue and the clouds are so white and everything smells so wonderful." She took

a deep breath. "Mmmm. What's that? That sweet, sweet smell."

"That's only the syringa," said Joan. "Over there." She nodded to a bush covered with waxy white blossoms.

"Only the syringa!" exclaimed Vicky. "We haven't any syringa in Pittstown."

A crowd of students had gathered around Donna in the center of the lawn. Joan said to Vicky, "She's planning a swimming party at White Sands. She invited me at breakfast."

"Are you going?"

"No," said Joan. "I don't like swimming. It's too much work."

"I don't know how to swim."

"You don't?" asked Joan, surprised.

"No, there wasn't anything but an old mudhole at home. And the boys monopolized that. But I'd love to learn."

"Maybe if you hung around," said Joan, "Donna would ask you."

Vicky shook her head. "She'd never ask me, don't worry."

They started across the lawn. As they passed the group, Donna called out, "Congratulations, Miss Lind, on getting the part." There was nothing wrong in the remark but Vicky didn't like the way Donna said it. Keeping her eyes focused on the billows of clouds in the sky above her Vicky crossed the lawn. Donna said something else and the crowd laughed.

Joan tugged at the sleeve of Vicky's blouse. "She

wanted that Janet Higgins part herself. That's what's biting her."

Vicky didn't want to talk about it. If she was going to spend a summer here at the same place with Donna Russell, she'd have to learn not to fight back. She thought, All she wants is some sign to prove that she's bothered me and I'm not going to give it to her.

From her window Vicky watched the station wagon full of students leave for the beach. Although she was sorry they had not asked her along, she was determined not to spend the afternoon in her room brooding over it.

She combed her hair and pinned it up off her neck for coolness. "I know what I'll do," she said. "I'll go down to see the boats."

The steamboat dock was hardly more than a stone's throw from Skipper's Inn. As she walked along Captain's Lane, she looked at the houses and half wished she might bump into one of the old sea captains. With almost every step, she drew in deep breaths of the river air, loving the fresh, clean smell.

At the end of the street, the road widened out to a wooden pier. The scene before her was so colorful she stopped to let her eyes feast on it. A broad band of river shimmered clear and blue between the wooded shore lines. Mahogany motorboats and white launches lay at their moorings, glistening in the sun, and the billowing canvas of several sailboats added grace and gaiety

to the picture. Vicky walked out to the edge of the pier, the breeze from the river blowing cool on her neck and arms and whipping her skirt about her legs. A boy and a girl, dressed alike in blue dungarees and white sweat shirts, climbed out of an outboard motor tied up at the dock. Arm in arm they crossed over to a large building which bore a huge sign, "Marine Supplies and Eats." Vicky smiled at the "Eats." It sounded so Yankee. An attendant in oily overalls came out of the store, nodded to the couple, and walked over to a red gasoline pump on the pier. With quick, purposeful movements, he began to refuel a mahogany speedboat.

Vicky thought, I wish Gus could be here to see this. How he'd love it! It's so clean and fresh and beautiful!

She stood there taking in the sounds and smells of the place. That smell of the river, of course, dominated everything; but then there were the fumes of gasoline from the pumps and also a fishiness in the air which she traced to a pile of large nets which had been left in the sun to dry. Someone was cooking outdoors and the smell of the charcoal fire mingled with that of broiled meat. She thought, I'm glad I've just had a good lunch.

She watched the effortless flight of two birds and listened to their raucous cries. They must be sea gulls, she thought. They're beautiful. A speedboat darted out from the shore and for a moment drowned out everything else. As it faded away in the distance, she picked up other sounds more clearly: the even chug-chug of a motorboat, a victrola on somebody's porch, laughter and the juke box from the marine store, the distant roaring of an airplane. Then, with amusing suddenness, a man's

whistle broke in upon the other noises. It was a good whistle, carrying the tune well, and it had a dashing, rolling quality. She thought, The tune's an old-fashioned one. Now, what is it? Oh, I know: "Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair."

She peeked around a row of pilings and saw the whistler. He was an elderly gentleman, sitting alone on a high-backed bench that looked very much like a church pew. As she took in his faded blue sailor's coat and the toughness of his brown skin, marked by interlacings of tiny red veins, she thought, I'll bet he's one of the sea captains. She moved closer for a better look. He was whittling a boat model, scraping a knife carefully along the miniature hull with a remarkable deftness and gentleness for hands so large and broad. His eyes spotted her shoes and ran slowly up to her face.

"Hello," he said.

"Hello. Mind if I watch?"

"Nope, so long's you don't charge nothing for it." His voice was resonant as if he were used to shouting orders. "Have a seat," he said, moving over to make room.

Before she sat down Vicky stooped over and read the name on the brass plaque which was nailed on the end of the bench—Captain Jared Jelliff. "Is that your name?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," he said.

"And this is your own private bench?"

"Yes, ma'am. Salvaged her when they demolished the old church a few years ago." He pointed with his knife to the brass plaque. "That there trinket came off the door of the schooner *Katrinka*."

"Then you're a real sea captain."

"Nigh on to fifty years." His keen brown eyes glowed. "Skipper of the schooner *Mary Lockwood*, of the schooner *Cleopatra*, of the yacht *Ellen*, of the schooner *Katrinka*, of the schooner *Lavinia Jelliff*." He held up the boat he was whittling. His strong, knotty hands were wrinkled and splotted with the largest freckles she had ever seen. "This is the *Katrinka*, last boat I skippered."

Vicky leaned over and examined the boat. "You must have had a very romantic life," she said.

He grinned. "If you call hard work romantic." He went back to his whittling. "Didn't have all the new-fangled gadgets in those days. When he was short-handed, a skipper had to be willing to do lots of odd jobs. Handle his cargo, manage his books, cook his own meals." His eyes twinkled as he looked at her. "Many a time I had to mend my own sails and scrub the decks."

"Just the same, it sounds wonderful to me." She stretched out her arms as if to hug the river and the sky and the boats to her. "Why, I never knew there was so much water in the whole world. Do you know, this is the first time I've ever even seen a boat."

Captain Jelliff carefully set his model of the *Katrinka* down on the seat between them and stared at her. "Never seen a boat before!" he exploded. "What neck of the woods you come from?"

"Pittstown, West Virginia. It's coal-mining country."

He appraised her a moment before asking, "You one of the students at that there Sunnycove Theater Workshop?" She nodded. He shifted his plaid cap to an even

jauntier position over his right eye and said, "So you're going to be an actress. Guess that's about as tough as following the sea, round the turn of the century." He studied her shrewdly. "You don't look like the rest of those students. Seen a lot of them hanging out down here on the dock in the last few years since I been home for good. Girls are mostly the flighty kind. Out for a good time. Never thought they were really serious about acting."

"Well, I'm serious about it."

"What's your name? Maybe someday I'll be seeing you in a moving picture."

"My name's Victoria Lind. And you're very nice to say that, but you've got to have a pretty face to be in the movies."

"Their faces ain't what I'd call pretty," he said with a snort of disgust. "All look alike. Big eyes, big mouths, eyelashes halfway down their cheeks, hair flying around their shoulders." He looked at Vicky. "Now I like a face like yours, one that says something."

Captain Jelliff turned back to his boat model. Vicky watched him silently a while. Then she said, "Jelliff's the name of one of the boat works in town." She waved her hand to the shore at the left. "I've seen the big neon sign on it from my window at night."

"Yes, ma'am. My grandfather started that outfit. Jelliff's builds the best boats in the country. Been doing it a hundred and some odd years now." They both looked up as a blond-haired boy in white sailor pants and a bright blue shirt came out of the marine store. His arms

full of groceries, he ran down one of the gangplanks to a float at which a sailboat was tied.

"Hi, Cap'n Jelly," he called.

"Hi yourself, Peter Bradford. What you going to name that broken-down hulk you call a boat?"

The boy was aboard the boat, dumping his groceries on one of the seats in the small cabin. "Don't know yet," he answered.

Captain Jelliff stood up and brushed some shavings off his trousers. He picked up a carved cane, the handle of which was studded with tiny sea shells, and limped over to the edge of the pier. He called down to the boy in the boat, "Heard last week how you salvaged this derelict sloop from Shipwreck Point and reconditioned her."

"Well, don't you think she was worth saving?" the boy asked.

"I ain't saying," said the Captain. "I'll bet my bottom dollar it's a bad, leaky piece of work. You Bradfords don't know how to build a boat. You ain't turned out but one decent model in your whole career and that was a design you swiped off the Jelliffs." The boy laughed and Vicky thought, He takes Captain Jelliff's kidding good-naturedly. I guess they've known each other a long time.

A tiny calico kitten suddenly dashed out from the cabin of the sailboat and ran up the gangplank toward them. It pawed at Captain Jelliff's trousers. He held out his cane and played with it. "This your mascot?" he asked Peter Bradford.

Peter looked up, surprised. "How'd he get up there?" he asked. He jumped off the boat and came up the gang-

plank. Reaching down, he scooped up the kitten in a large bronzed hand. Vicky noticed his hands. They had the long, slender fingers of an artist and the broad, capable palms of a mechanic. He held the kitten in one hand and wagged a finger at it with his other. "I don't know what I'm going to do with you, Seaweed," he said. The kitten chewed at his finger.

"Seaweed!" said the Captain. "What a name for a cat!"

"I named him that," said Peter, "because I found him in a pile of kelp out at White Sands."

"Oh, I like the name," said Vicky. "It's cute."

Peter Bradford glanced at her and looked away. She thought, Maybe I shouldn't have said that. He doesn't seem to like it. She looked at his bronzed profile with the forelock of thick hair hanging down over his forehead. He was Yankee stock, no question about that. It showed in the firmness of his jaw, the steady, imperturbable expression in his blue eyes, which seemed even bluer because of his blue shirt. His features were sharp but pleasant and there was an arresting contrast between his deeply-tanned skin and straw-colored hair, which had been bleached out by the sun. She thought, It's the kind of face I like. Not too handsome but with plenty of strength.

He walked down the gangplank and dumped Seaweed into the cockpit. "Want to come aboard and look her over, Cap'n Jelly?" he called back.

"Wouldn't step on a Bradford boat if I was marooned on a desert island," said the Captain.

"Come on, Cap'n Jelly. 'Fess up. Bet you've already inspected her from stem to stern," called Peter.

Using his cane, Captain Jelliff walked stiffly down the gangplank. Vicky followed him. The Captain stepped on the float to which the boat was moored. He stood with his cane behind him and leaned on it with both his hands. Then he boomed out, "The mast ain't stepped right, the rudder's loose, the centerboard squeaks when you pull her up, the trunk looks pretty narrow to me, the cleats ain't heavy enough by a long shot. That's a secondhand gooseneck you got there or I'll eat it. One good pull on the halliards and they'll snap in two." He pointed his cane to the furled sails. "I ain't had time to hoist them yet but I can see they're red, and only a Bradford would put red sails on a sloop." He shifted his plaid cap. "If you offered me fifty dollars to take the wreck off your hands, I wouldn't give her storage space."

Peter smiled affably at the Captain. "Would you like me to haul her out so you can examine the caulking?"

"Don't need to. Leave her tied up here for a week and she'll be stuck in the mud at the bottom of the river."

Peter laughed. "Too bad you've got such a bad opinion of my sloop. Otherwise I'd take you along for a sail." Peter started hoisting his sails. They were a brilliant red.

Captain Jelliff shifted his cap again and looked at Vicky with a twinkle in his eyes that told her he was up to something. "Peter Bradford," he called. Peter looked at him. "I'd like you to meet a new friend of mine." He pointed to Vicky with his cane. "Miss Victoria Lind."

Vicky smiled and said, "How do you do," but Peter Bradford just nodded curtly.

The Captain went on. "Miss Lind's from West Virginia and ain't never seen a boat before today. Why

don't you give her a treat? Take her for a sail instead of me."

The sails were up and Peter made ready to cast off. Captain Jelliff bellowed, "I said, why don't you take this little lady along with you? She looks like a real nice girl to me."

When Peter straightened up, his face was flushed through his deep tan. He spoke angrily. "I'm going to my shack on Hidden Point for the week end. How can I take a girl along?"

Vicky thought, But why is he so angry? And why is he taking Captain Jelliff seriously all at once?

Without looking at them, Peter Bradford cast off and the sloop moved out across the river. The Captain turned to her and threw back his head, laughing heartily.

"I knew that would rile him," he said. "Always does. Peter Bradford's been shy of girls ever since he was knee-high to a grasshopper." He stepped off the float and stood beside Vicky. "Not that he's a sissy, mind you. Just a little scared of girls." He shook his head. "Too bad. He's sure missing a lot of fun. When I was his age—'course I was better looking than any Bradford—I had quite a few flames."

Vicky watched the red sails of Peter Bradford's boat. "He seemed awfully nice, otherwise."

"He is," said Captain Jelliff. "Peter's a fine boy, even if he is a Bradford. It's his uncle who owns the boat works. Peter's lived with him and his aunt since he was three years old."

"Does he work in the boat works?"

"Mornings, during the summer. Afternoons he goes off to his cabin on Hidden Point."

"Does he go to college?" asked Vicky. Captain Jelliff nodded. "What's he studying?"

"Something highfalutin called Business Administration. Going to help his uncle out when he's finished."

Vicky turned around and watched the sails as they headed down the river. "I'd love to go for a sail on that boat. But if he's so shy of girls, I don't suppose I ever will."

Captain Jelliff rubbed his hand along the side of his nose. "Well, 'tain't much of a boat anyway," he said.

He walked around the pier with her, explaining the difference in the kinds of sailboats. Vicky soon could tell which was a sloop, a yawl, or a schooner. At last Captain Jelliff stopped in front of the marine store. "Got to get me two big bottles of root beer," he said. "My favorite beverage. The woman in there," he jerked his thumb toward the store, "will swear they're all out of it until I threaten to go behind the counter and help myself. She likes to keep it for the yacht trade." Vicky laughed. Captain Jelliff held out his knotty hand. "It's been a real pleasure meeting you, Miss Lind," he said.

"Everyone calls me Vicky, Cap'n Jelly."

He showed his strong teeth in a pleased smile. "All right, Vicky. You look me up in my pew over there next time you're down here, will you?" She nodded. "We'll have some more lessons in navigation."

She watched him limp into the store. She thought, He's the most outspoken man I've ever met, but I can't help liking him.

The student workshop lost no time getting under way. Miss Dyson, their other instructor, turned out to be an energetic young woman with enough versatility to teach pantomime, make-up, and speech. More blunt than Mr. Litchfield and somewhat harder to please, she corrected them frequently. However, she was quite impartial, and even the girls from the American Academy did not escape her criticism.

Donna Russell did not like Miss Dyson. Sometimes she took her correction with bad grace. Vicky thought, That's foolish. We're here to learn. If we don't take correction well, even when it's not tactfully given, we'll never get anywhere.

To Mr. Litchfield, of course, Donna was charming. She was not at all bashful about telling why. "After all, Mr. Litchfield's the one who selects us for the professional parts," she said with a defiant glint in her eyes.

The students freely discussed their reactions to Mr. Litchfield's direction. It was much more professional than the direction most of them had received before. In

Vicky's high school the dramatics teacher had simply handed out the parts and told them to learn their lines as quickly as they could. Then, from the first rehearsal, they had walked around the stage with their play books in their hands, trying to concentrate on both the lines and the action at the same time.

Mr. Litchfield worked differently. He asked them to sit in a circle and "talk" their parts to each other. Frequently he stopped them to say, "What's the character thinking about when he says that speech?" or, "How is he reacting to what the other characters are saying?"

He was always saying, "Don't use your books as a crutch. Stop reading the lines to each other. Talk them. Look at each other when you speak." Most of the students found this extremely difficult but, thanks to Gus's training, Vicky easily followed Mr. Litchfield's instructions.

"And learn to listen," he would advise them. "Listening well is the very core of the art of acting. You can't really call yourself an actor until you've learned how to listen." More than once he made a daydreaming student jump by saying, "Don't sit there thinking about what you're going to have for dinner or where you're going to be at three o'clock this afternoon. Think about what the other person is saying. Never step out of character the moment you finish your own speech."

The students grumbled among themselves because his method seemed tedious. But just when they thought they wouldn't be able to stand another hour of sitting in that tight little semicircle of chairs, Mr. Litchfield said

one morning, "All right, you've done a good job of the reading rehearsals. Today we'll walk around."

There was a noisy sigh of relief from all of them and Goodloe Buffum shouted, "Yippee! Three cheers for the director!"

Mr. Litchfield went up on the stage and called to the boys, "Will you come up and give me a hand with the furniture?"

Before he had finished the sentence, Buff, Walter Gibbs, and Norman Tonnerly had vaulted to the stage. Mr. Litchfield talked to the whole cast as he directed the arrangement of the furniture.

"The first scene is the dining room in Madame La Fère's pension in Paris. Here, Buff, you move this little table up near the wall. Walter and Norman, shove that larger table directly across from the little one. Now push a couple of chairs up to each table. That's it." He drew chalk marks on the floor of the stage. "Those are the windows."

He looked out over the auditorium. "Where's Vicky Lind?"

"Here I am." She got up and went up the steps to the stage. "You're no longer Vicky Lind," he said. "From now on you answer to the name of Janet Higgins." He nodded to the larger table. "All right, Janet, you sit down there. No, not that chair. The one facing the window. So you can look out on the Boulevard." Vicky pulled out the chair and sat down.

Mr. Litchfield came over and talked to her. "It's spring, Janet Higgins. And you're in Paris. You can see the little leaves uncurling on the trees. You smell the

flowers. You hear the birds singing." He leaned across the table. "Do you smell and hear Paris, Janet Higgins?"

Vicky took a deep breath and sighed. Some of the students laughed. Mr. Litchfield turned on them and said, "Paris in the spring is no laughing matter, my friends."

"Now where's Eric Mann?" he asked. Eric came up on the stage. Just the way he stood there, he looked like Paul, the young French diplomat with whom Janet was to fall in love.

Mr. Litchfield pointed to a stepladder. "That's the stairway to the second floor. It's your first morning at Madame La Fère's. You've got a new job and it's spring and you feel wonderful. You come bounding down the stairs into the dining room."

"You want me to bound down that stepladder?" Eric asked.

"As well as you can," said Mr. Litchfield. The girls tittered as Eric climbed the ladder and stood there waiting for his cue.

"Now we want Madame La Fère."

Cheri Weston got up and started to run up the steps.

"Stop!" Mr. Litchfield shouted at her. She looked at him, surprised. "You're an old woman, Madame La Fère. You'll never see seventy again. You don't run up the steps. You bend over." Cheri stooped over. "No, not at the shoulders. At the hips. That's better. Now hobble. No, not so fast. Slower. Slower. That's good. Good."

Mr. Litchfield drew two more white marks on the stage. "Those are the doors," he said. "You enter from

the left, Madame La Fère. You bring in Janet's and Paul's breakfast from the kitchen."

Cheri forgot herself and started to walk off stage.

"Madame La Fère," Mr. Litchfield insisted, "you're much too spry. Hobble. Bend and hobble." He picked up a short board lying on the floor of the stage. "Here's your tray. Now find yourself some dishes."

"Where?" wailed Cheri.

"Oh, there's a lot of junk off stage. Help yourself."

She returned in a few moments with three chipped saucers and two cups without handles. "Will these do?"

"I think so," said Mr. Litchfield. "At least they'll give you the feeling."

He looked from Vicky to Eric to Cheri. "Now here we are, the three of us. Madame La Fère and two attractive young people. Madame La Fère is a bit silly in her old age. She comes in and sees these two young people and at once she thinks, Ah, a love match! She looks out the window and smells and hears the spring. It goes straight to her silly old heart. She simply has to do something about it. What a pity, she thinks, for two young people to sit there at separate tables in the spring! So she deliberately dumps a pot of coffee over Paul's table. Then she swears she hasn't another clean tablecloth in the whole house. So there's nothing for Paul to do but go sit at the table with the attractive young American girl."

Everyone was sitting forward in his seat listening to Mr. Litchfield. "All right," he finished. "We're all set. Let's begin the rehearsal."

As the play progressed and they moved about the

stage, Vicky could see the advantage of the reading rehearsals. She thought, Why, this is easy and natural now. We're not stumbling all over the furniture the way we did at High. It isn't like acting a part in a play at all. We're just like people talking naturally to each other. We even sound as if we meant what we said.

That day marked the first of a series of fascinating rehearsals. Each morning Mr. Litchfield directed a different scene.

Afternoons, a group of students was always rehearsing somewhere, in the workshop, on the lawn of Skipper's Inn, in an old apple orchard belonging to a friendly neighbor, or in one of the secluded spots at the steamboat dock. Most of the students had a few afternoons when they could fish or swim, play tennis, ride bikes along the country roads, practice driving at a near-by golf range, or read a book.

Vicky was hardly ever free. Because she had the leading part she was needed for almost every scene. However, rehearsing with Eric Mann was really fun. She found him just as serious about his acting as she was about hers. She sometimes thought, Why, it's not as if we were just a couple of students in a summer workshop. We're like real show people.

She would say to him, "I'd like to try that scene over again if you don't mind."

He'd smile and say, "Of course I don't mind. I'd like to do it, too."

Donna was the only one who spoiled the fun. Whenever they worked together in a scene, she was openly hostile to Vicky. If Mr. Litchfield wasn't around, she

followed the red sails as they moved out across the river. She thought, I wonder what he's really like.

Captain Jelliff had told her some sketchy facts about him. But what was he like when you knew him well? You couldn't always tell about people from the things others said about them. Down in Pittstown, everyone thought of Gus as a poor, overworked schoolteacher. But Vicky knew a quite different Gus. She knew Gus the idealist, who believed that all men, given the opportunity and the education, could rise to heights of achievement. Pittstown natives laughed and said, "Gus Lind? Oh, he's always discovering a genius!" They didn't understand him at all.

Maybe that was the way with Peter Bradford. Maybe if you got to know him, there would be more beneath the surface than even the shrewd Captain Jelliff knew about. The red sails were quite far out now, passing a large yacht that was coming in to shore.

"Well, Vicky Lind," she said to herself, "you won't stand much chance of finding out what he's like. He didn't even remember you."

Everyone was so busy it became a commonplace remark among the students that they only sat down at mealtimes. They were deep in preparations for their workshop production of "Paris, Good-by." Mr. Litchfield had asked for volunteers to hunt up properties and Vicky and Joan Scott had offered their services. They spent a whole evening scouting around Sunnycove with a list that included, among other things, two gilded mirrors, a chest of drawers, a wing chair, a console table, and three vases. They made trips to a dozen or more houses where Mr. Litchfield had previously telephoned to make sure they would receive a friendly welcome. Vicky had never seen so many attics before: scrambled messes of attics where you had to climb over screens and stovepipes and chairs to see what you wanted; orderly attics with curtains on the windows and not a speck of dust visible anywhere; attics with the flavor of the sea lingering in captains' trunks and old sea chests; attics which told in cinnabar and lacquered boxes, carved ivories, Chinese screens, and silk fans of Sunnycove's adventurous past.

Up and down the stairs they clattered until their feet ached and their eyes were tired from peering through the dusk at old furniture and knickknacks. Goodloe Buffum and Eric Mann followed them in a station wagon and carried back their precious load of findings.

"Paris, Good-by" would be given in the workshop barn that coming Thursday. Since no admission would be charged, invitations had been sent to church groups and the various local clubs.

"We'll have a good crowd," Mr. Litchfield said. "Connecticut Yankees like to get something for nothing. And they make a responsive audience."

Vicky was so excited about it she could hardly wait until Thursday. The rehearsals were coming along well; she knew her part perfectly and the only thing she had to do now was to select her costumes.

One small incident occurred during the week which widened the rift between Vicky and Donna. Eric and Vicky were rehearsing on the lawn outside the Inn, going over a scene which needed special attention. Donna and Cheri and a few of their crowd had sauntered over to watch.

Once Eric stopped and looked at Donna with an annoyed expression. Vicky thought, I hope he doesn't say anything to her. It's just what she wants.

Eric turned back to Vicky and they continued their rehearsal. When Vicky had finished a particularly moving speech, Donna yawned loudly and said, "Come on, gang. Let's go somewhere more exciting. These hams are boring."

Eric wheeled on her. "Listen, Donna," he said, his

jaw tense with anger, "why don't you just give up the whole idea of the movies and marry a millionaire? It would be much less work and it would be a lot pleasanter for the rest of us."

"What's the matter with you?" she asked him. "Are you developing a crush on our Bernhardt of the coal mines? Can't anyone even make a remark without you playing hero and protecting her?"

Vicky said under her breath, "Don't answer her, Eric." He stood there a moment, clenching and unclenching his fists. Then he turned away and the crowd broke up. After this incident Donna treated Vicky even more scornfully, blaming her for Eric's cutting remark.

That week end the members of the professional company began to arrive. Gloria Fenton, who would star in the first production at the Sunnycove Playhouse, was expected Saturday afternoon. Miss Sniff had been boasting all week about the letter she had received from Miss Fenton in which she said she would not think of spending a summer at Sunnycove without staying at Skipper's Inn.

A few of the minor players chose to join her, undoubtedly because of the lower rates. But most of the professionals, including Sybil Shaw, the other leading lady, preferred the luxury of Covington Manor, a spacious hotel on Harbor Road.

"Let them stay up there if they've a mind to," Miss Penelope Sniff cheerfully commented. "I've got my hands full as it is."

It was true. Getting ready for the arrival of Gloria Fenton was like preparing for the entourage of a maharani. Miss Sniff buzzed and flitted and darted about the

Inn like the tiny hummingbird person she was. Saturday morning she went into the kitchen, put an apron over her dress, and mixed the hot breads herself, three different kinds of them. She made the peach cobbler and the filling for the lemon meringue pie and drove the poor pastry chef almost frantic with her instructions for the strawberry-rhubarb tarts. The old house became a tantalizing mixture of good smells—duckling and chicken, pot roast simmering in tomatoes and cloves and bay leaf, and the savory smell of dressing seasoned with thyme. Her face damp and flushed, Miss Sniff finally left the kitchen and changed to a cool voile dress. But she did not rest from her activity. In and out of Gloria Fenton's suite of rooms she darted, dusting it all over again, changing the doilies several times until she found exactly the right set to harmonize with the draperies, even dragging an extra chair from the attic.

The girls caught Miss Sniff's enthusiasm. Most of them stayed home that afternoon instead of rushing off to the beach. The front parlor, which the students usually shunned, now boasted a half-dozen lolling figures in shorts and sunsuits. The girls gossiped and flipped the pages of magazines, yawned, or grumbled about the delay. But everyone stayed.

Miss Fenton arrived just before dinner. Miss Sniff was halfway across the lawn before any of the girls were out on the front porch. Throwing open her arms, she caught Gloria Fenton in a tight embrace.

Vicky looked at the actress and thought, Why, she's so natural! If you passed her on the street, you'd think she was any young girl out for an afternoon's walk. Her

dress was a plain cotton print and she wore no jewelry, not even a ring. Unlike most of the women in her profession, she kept her dark, naturally curly hair short, and the only make-up she wore was a modest amount of lipstick. When Miss Sniff introduced her to the girls, she had a smile and a warm handclasp for each of them. Then, arm in arm, she and Miss Sniff walked into the Inn and the crowd of students went about their own business.

Vicky grabbed hold of Joan and said, "I'd like to go over to the wardrobe room and pick out my costumes. It's the only chance I'll have. Want to come along?"

"Sure I'll go," said Joan. "I've got to find a hat to go with the suit I'm wearing in the play. That's all I need."

"I wish that's all I needed," said Vicky. "I've got to find enough clothes for five different changes."

The wardrobe room was in an ell of the workshop. Heavy poles had been nailed across in several places and these were hung with an assortment of street clothes, suits, coats, blouses, wraps, period costumes, and evening dresses. The latter were the most colorful, ranging from delicate pastels to rich, heavy purples, terra cottas, and maroons. Vicky walked along the row of dresses, fingering the supple crepes, the smooth satins, the soft velvets and lamés, the stiff moirés and taffetas.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she said to Joan.

"It surely is, honey. Wouldn't I just love to have access to that row of dresses the next formal I go to!"

Vicky looked around the room. On shelves along the walls were the accessories, hats of felt or velvet or straw or plush, hats with flowers and feathers, hats with bows

and ribbons and clusters of fruit. There were gloves of every color and length. There were walking shoes and dress pumps and evening slippers and sashes and belts and bags and flowers and plumes.

Vicky said, "I've never seen so many clothes at one time in one place. Where did they get them all?"

"Mr. Litchfield says they begged and borrowed for twenty years from everyone between here and New York."

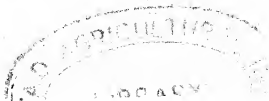
Vicky had little trouble in finding the street clothes she needed, but the evening gown gave her some difficulty. It had to be red.

Suddenly she pulled out a cerise gown from the rack of evening dresses. "What a lovely shade!" she said. "I wish I had the coloring to carry it off. I'd wear it in the last scene."

Joan took the dress from her and held it up to Vicky's face. "The color's all right," she said. "The question is, will it fit?"

Vicky tried it on. Joan stood off and looked at her critically. "It's too big in the waist and much too long, but I think we can fix that." She found a box of pins and went to work fitting the dress. As Joan knelt down to pin up the hem, Vicky said, "I can hardly believe I have the right to wear this." She ran her hands over the soft faille. "I feel a little guilty."

Joan looked up at her. "You're funny," she said. "When you get to be the great actress your brother Gus expects you to be, I suppose you'll say the same thing, that it's hard for you to believe you have the right to be it."



"If I ever get there," said Vicky. Joan got up from her knees and helped Vicky pull the dress over her head. Vicky said, "There's one thing I'll miss next Thursday when we give 'Paris, Good-by.'"

"What's that?" Joan put a few more pins in the hem.

"Having Gus in the audience. He always sat in the fifth row on the aisle," said Vicky. "Of course I never looked over the footlights, but I knew he was there and it sort of boosted my morale."

"Gus must be a swell brother," said Joan.

"He is," said Vicky. "Every time I was in a play at school, he'd send me flowers. No matter what he had to do without himself. It was always the same kind of bouquet."

"What was it?" asked Joan, her pretty face alight with interest.

"White roses. It was all white, even the ribbons it was tied with. And the card always said, 'To one of America's great actresses. I'll be with you tonight.'" Vicky folded the cerise dress carefully and laid it on top of the other things they had selected. "Gus's faith in me always made me do the best I could."

Joan did not answer. There was something about her silence that made Vicky look at her. She was staring at the doorway. Donna stood watching them. Without speaking she crossed over to one of the shelves.

Vicky thought, I wonder if she heard what I said about Gus.

Joan and Vicky selected some gold slippers to go with the evening gown and then gathered up the costumes and left the workshop. As they hurried down Captain's

Lane, Vicky said, "Have you ever noticed the expression in Donna Russell's eyes when she looks at me?"

"She resents you," said Joan. "She has from the beginning."

"But why?" asked Vicky.

"It's a form of jealousy."

"But why should Donna be jealous of me? She's so beautiful and she's popular and she knows how to push her way ahead."

Joan shifted her load of costumes to the other arm and said, "I can't read her mind, so I don't know just what's bothering her, but I know enough about girls to know she's resentful because you've got something she wishes she had." They turned in at the Inn and Joan said, "Whew, am I glad it's almost dinner! I'm starving."

"So am I," said Vicky, and they dropped the subject of Donna.

At dinner the boys were bursting with news about Sybil Shaw. "We were working on the scenery, painting the woodwork," said Goodloe Buffum, "when Sybil descends on us in all her fabulous glory."

"Some girl," shouted Norman Tonnerly, taking his attention away from his pot roast and mashed potatoes long enough to roll his eyes. "She had on the niftiest pair of green satin slacks and a bright pink sweater."

"Anyone can wear green satin slacks and a pink sweater," said Donna.

"But not the way Sybil Shaw can," said Goodloe Buffum. "With three necklaces and a ring on each hand with a stone in it the size of an egg, and earrings down to her shoulders."

"I think she's going to be a tough dame to work with," said Norman. "She's got too many preferences."

"She certainly has got preferences," said Mark Forgan. "Anyone who's ever worked with Miss Shaw knows that." They all looked at Mark. His father had helped to direct four of her pictures, so he should be in a position to know.

"I thought she'd never shut up," said Buff. He mussed up his hair, making it fly wildly about his face in an absurd imitation of Sybil Shaw's hair. Then he opened his mouth as far as he could and shouted, "I want the lights two inches lower; no, two inches higher; no, just the way they were. I want the theater ventilated, but none of those big moths must get in. I can't stand moths. They give me the jitters. I'm afraid one of them will get in my mouth when I'm saying my lines."

The dining room rang with laughter and Buff went on. "I want the dressing rooms sprayed before every performance. And I want two pitchers of iced water left in my room and I want everyone backstage to be absolutely quiet for five minutes before I make my first entrance and I don't want any mirrors on the stage because it's bad luck. I don't care what you use in place of them, but no mirrors. I want my maid to check personally every property I use because I don't trust anyone else. I want. I want. I want." Buff shook his head in disgust and reached for another roll.

"She brought along two dogs, a boxer and a French poodle, right into the theater with her," said Jack Trent. "She let them run all over the place. The boxer almost

took a nip out of me when I told him to take his paws off the wet paint."

"And her perfume!" Buff leaned back against his chair and pretended to swoon. "Ah, her perfume. It smelled like the Arabian Nights and Paris and the Riviera all rolled up into one. Oh, Sybil!"

"I don't know why you're all so excited," said Donna. "Everyone knows what Sybil Shaw is. The magazines and the newspapers have played her up as the number one glamour girl of the stage."

Hope Esmond shoved away her plate. "Well," she said, "she doesn't impress me. She's just a name and a personality. Gloria Fenton's got more real ability in her right eyebrow than Sybil Shaw has in her whole ten trunks full of glamour."

Vicky thought, Good for you, Hope. That's telling them.

"But she's so beautiful!" wailed Norman.

"That's the man of it," said Hope. "Bowled over by a beautiful face." They all looked at Donna and she tossed her head defiantly. "Sybil Shaw's box-office dynamite," Hope went on. "But she's as unreliable as New England weather."

"That's right," said Susan Howard. "She'll go along all right for a while and then she'll have a fight with the director or stage manager or producer, and whoops! If she gets mad enough, she pretends to be sick and lets an understudy take her part for a few weeks."

The peach cobbler appeared and the boys were too busy with that to discuss Sybil Shaw any further.

"Let's hurry so we can take a walk before it gets too

dark," said Joan to Vicky. They were the first ones to leave the dining room. Outside the Inn, they turned up Captain's Lane. Joan linked her arm through Vicky's and said, "I just hate to think what would happen if any of us got a part in one of Sybil Shaw's plays. If we missed a cue, she'd be likely to pick us up and hurl us into the audience."

"I wouldn't mind that," said Vicky grinning. "It would be worth it to get even a walk-on in a professional play."

"Oh, you," said Joan teasingly. "You'd put up with anything to get to Broadway."

For a fraction of a minute Vicky took her thoughts off Janet Higgins. I'll be glad when this act is over, she thought, and I can get out of this woolen suit. The stage was as hot as a boiler room and the heat of the floodlights seemed like something solid pressing against her. Beads of perspiration seeped through her grease paint and trickled down her cheeks. However, the audience was a responsive, quiet one. The only sounds her sensitive ears picked up were the faint creaking of one of the rockers and the chirping of crickets outside the open windows.

Eric's serious face was pale and damp under the lights. He felt the heat, too.

Then she resolutely shut out the audience and the heat and became Janet Higgins again. Eric crossed over and took both her hands in his and spoke his next line.

He had said the words again and again in rehearsal, but this was the magic of the theater, that he could stand here tonight and speak the words as if for the first time.

He leaned down and kissed her on the cheek. Then he let her go and she turned and walked off the stage.

In the dim light backstage she passed Norman Tonnerly and Buff as they fussed with the gelatins for the next scene. It was to be a sidewalk café in Paris and most of the cast appeared in it. They stood around quietly waiting to go on. Vicky nodded to Hope and Susan as she passed them. She thought, I've got to hurry if I'm going to change my costume and touch up my make-up. It certainly needs it. The heat is terrific.

Someone grabbed her arm. It was Joan. "You're simply marvelous tonight, Vicky. Keep it up."

"Thanks."

"Gloria Fenton's here. She came in during the second act with some friends. They're sitting in the last row. Norman Tonnerly went out front for something and saw her."

"Thanks for telling me," said Vicky. "Will you come in as soon as you're off and help me fix the shoulder straps on the cerise dress?"

"Yes," said Joan, "I will."

Vicky hurried to the empty dressing room. It was stuffy and close. Clothes, make-up kits, and suitcases were scattered over all the chairs. After the dimness of the hallway, she blinked in the bright lights that studded the mirrors above the make-up tables. The tables were a mess. No one had bothered to put away anything and powder puffs, oozy sticks of grease paint, melting blue and crimson liners, gaping cans of pink and yellow powder were strewn everywhere. A haze of fine dust from the powder filled the room, and Vicky put the back of her hand against her nostrils to shut out the sickish sweet fragrance of stage make-up.

She went directly to where the cerise dress hung and took it down. Yanking off her jacket and skirt, she tossed them on the nearest chair. She slipped the dress carefully over her head and pulled it down. She thought, I'll let Joan fuss with the details when she gets here.

She walked over to her place at the make-up table. Someone had shoved aside her things and put a large box there. She thought, Everyone's in such a hurry tonight. Then it suddenly occurred to her that the box might be part of the properties. She picked it up and lifted the lid. At first she couldn't make out what it contained, but the object gradually took shape. It was a bouquet, or rather it was supposed to be one. The center was composed of large pieces of coal held together by a wad of putty. Around the coal was arranged a tangle of weeds. A cascade of frayed ribbon held the whole hideous thing together and a card lay beside it. She picked it up and read, "To the Bernhardt of the coal mines. All my wishes for your success. From your loving brother, Gus."

Vicky stared at the bouquet, unable to believe her eyes. Then in an upsurge of revulsion she hurled it on the table. Her stomach throbbed. The stuffiness of the room settled down on her. Her breath came in short, jerky gasps. She thought, So Donna heard every word I said the other day.

There were footsteps in the hallway. "It's Joan," she said. She stared down at the revolting thing, wondering what to do with it. Then she jammed it into the box and slammed the cover on it. Joan came in. She stopped when she saw Vicky's face.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "What's happened? Are you sick?"

Vicky tried to answer and couldn't.

"What's wrong, Vicky?"

"It's hot on the stage," she said. "The heat's getting me."

Joan said, "Well, it will be over soon. This next is the last scene."

Vicky nodded. Joan came over and fussed with the straps on the dress. Her eyes fell on the box. "What's that?" she asked. She reached over to touch it.

Vicky snatched it up and, throwing it into her suitcase, jammed down the lid. "It's nothing," she said.

Joan looked unconvinced. But without a word she turned her attention to Vicky's hair, pinning it up on her head. When she had finished, she said, "You need lipstick and powder." She pawed over a tangled mess of paper stumps, rouge boxes, and cosmetique until she found Vicky's cream rouge. With a paper stomp she carefully applied it to her lips. Then, dipping the puff into some pink powder, she pressed it lightly over Vicky's face. She removed the surplus powder with a soft brush.

"There, you look better," she said. "I'd say you looked lovely if it weren't for that sickish expression on your face." She searched Vicky's eyes. "Has it something to do with that box, Vicky?" she asked.

"I'll be all right as soon as I get out on the stage," said Vicky. She did not even bother to glance at herself in the mirror. The bouquet with its mocking lumps of coal haunted her thoughts. If Donna only hadn't put in

that card and signed Gus's name to it, it wouldn't have been so bad.

She walked through the dim passage from the dressing room to the stage. Several members of the cast passed her. The previous scene must be over. She would have to hurry.

Norman Tonnerly and Buff were sliding blue gelatins over the floodlights. The rest of the boys helped Mr. Litchfield with the scenery. Eric left them and came over to her.

"It's going over very well," he said. "Did you know Gloria Fenton's out there?"

"Yes," she said, almost choking on the word. The bouquet of coal and weeds danced before her eyes. Her hands were cold but her face burned as if it were on fire.

"Hey," Eric said, "are you all right? You look funny."

"I'm all right," she said. Things swam before her eyes and she clutched Eric's coat sleeve.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "We've got to go on. Mr. Litchfield is motioning."

They walked out on the stage. The set was flooded with silvery moonlight. The house lights went off. Vicky swayed a little but she pulled herself together. Linking her arm through Eric's, she looked up into his calm, reassuring face. She tried to remember her first line and couldn't. She thought, Stage fright. I'm going to have stage fright. Everyone gets it sometime or other and now I've got it.

Eric was talking, saying words she did not recognize.

He was filling in her speech by ad-libbing. She'd missed her cue. She roused herself and tried to remember her line. Suddenly it was almost as if she heard Gus's voice right there on the stage saying, "Don't be afraid, Vicky. Go ahead. Don't be afraid."

She looked up at Eric and her first line came back to her. She said it, listening to the sound of her own voice as if it didn't belong to her at all. But the fear had been broken and the rest of her lines followed automatically one after the other. However, she could not bring herself to shut out everything the way she always did, to feel the part so strongly that nothing else mattered, that nothing else really existed for her. She could not even listen to what Eric was saying. She was thinking all the time of that ugly bouquet with the chunks of coal in the center. Somehow or other she managed to get through the scene. She knew it was over because the curtain swung together and the audience applauded. Then the stage was full of people. She started to make her way through the crowd and someone grabbed hold of her. It was Eric.

"We've got to take a curtain call," he said gently.

He led her back to the middle of the stage where she joined hands with him on one side and Frank Fowler on the other. Their handclaps were sticky and hot. The curtain swung open and she looked out over the heads of the audience. The sea of faces was weird in the half light of the auditorium. She forced a smile and bowed her head. The audience applauded. The curtain closed but the audience did not stop clapping.

"They want Vicky and Eric," someone whispered.

She thought, I can't face them again. I spoiled the last scene and I can't face them. She turned and ran through the crowd on the stage. Several hands reached for her but she avoided them.

"Hey, Vicky, come back here." "Where's she going?" "What's the matter with her?" Their voices pounded in her ears.

She ran to the dressing room and snatched up her suitcase. She thought, I've got to get out of here before any of the others come in. She ran to the door. Several figures loomed at the end of the dim corridor. She turned in the opposite direction and ran out of the back door.

Outside she ran through a network of parked cars and into the road. She crossed over quickly and turned down Captain's Lane. Under the sign of Skipper's Inn she hesitated. There was no sense in going in now. The cast had planned a party in the dining room after the play. Someone would be sure to look for her to make her join them. She couldn't face them after what had happened. She turned away and ran down the street toward the dock.

It was cool down here by the river. It was quiet, too. The marine store was still brightly lighted, but this was a slack hour and not even the music of the juke box broke the stillness. A motor roared overhead. Vicky looked up. The lights of the Boston plane en route to New York blinked like traveling stars in the blackness of the sky. She thought, It must be about ten-thirty.

She carried her suitcase over to the edge of the pier. Some people lounged in the cabin of one of the cruisers, chatting and laughing. From the darkness of the dock the brightly lighted cabin seemed part of another world. She turned away and walked over to where several crates stood behind a dry-docked motorboat. She thought, Even if someone comes across the dock, I'll be completely hidden here.

She put down her suitcase and sat on one of the crates. At first she did not even try to think, but just sat there waiting for the feverish commotion inside her to subside. As the excitement began to ebb, the full impact of what had happened was brought home to her. She had spoiled

the last scene of the play. Eric had helped her as much as he could, and possibly it wasn't so noticeable to the audience. But Mr. Litchfield must have noticed it and Gloria Fenton, sitting out there in the last row, and all the other students and everyone who really mattered.

She heard footsteps and peeked around the end of the boat. It was so dark all she could make out was the outline of a boy and a girl. Then she heard their voices. It was Joan and Eric. "I'm sure she's around here somewhere," said Joan. "She loves to come down here to the dock."

Vicky huddled behind the boat. She thought, I hope they won't think of looking back here.

Snatches of what they said reached her. "There was a box on her make-up table that had something to do with the way she acted. . . . She must have found it there when she went back to change for the last scene. . . . She was all right until then. . . . She looked as if she'd had a terrible shock." Joan's high heels clicked on the wooden boards of the dock. "She must be somewhere around. I'm sure she's here."

"We've looked all over." That was Eric's voice. "I think we should go back."

She listened to Joan's footsteps click away in the distance and then fade out. She thought, I'm glad they've gone. I couldn't stand talking to anyone now. She slumped back upon the crate and watched the lights of a boat going down the river. A car drove up. She heard the voices of a boy and a girl and the slam of the screen door as they went into the store.

Her anger toward Donna melted into shame over what

she herself had done. She had been silly to let Donna's spiteful trick upset her. What would Gus have thought of her if he'd been there? After all he'd sacrificed to send her here, she had spoiled everything by losing her head. She'd spoiled the good impression she'd made on Mr. Litchfield and consequently the possibility of being chosen for a part in one of the professional plays. She had certainly let Gus down with a bang.

She wanted to cry. "That won't do any good," she said aloud. But the impulse was so strong she couldn't help herself. The tears came gently at first and they brought such relief she let them gush out. Her head fell forward and she cried until she couldn't cry any more.

All at once she thought of the cerise dress. It felt damp. She thought, Now I hope I haven't ruined the dress. That would be the last straw.

She raised her head and stared at a pair of white shoes. Her eyes traveled up white trousers and a dark coat and rested upon the sharp features of Peter Bradford's face.

"Have you finished?" he asked.

"How long have you been here?"

He answered her question by asking another. "What are you crying about?"

"If I feel like crying I've got a right to."

He smiled. Angry as she was, she had to admit he looked almost handsome when he smiled. He sat down on an empty crate. "If you'll tell me what's troubling you, I'll stay. Otherwise I'll just go over to the marine store and have the black and white soda I came down for." He smiled again. "You understand, I'd much

rather have the soda, but I sort of think you'd like to tell someone what's bothering you."

"I don't want to tell anyone," she said. "I couldn't tell anyone except Gus, and he isn't here."

"Who's Gus?"

"My brother. He's paying my way at the Sunnycove Workshop."

"Say," he said. "Now I get it. You're the girl who was with Cap'n Jelly the other day." She nodded. "I'd never have recognized you in that outfit." He stretched his long legs out in front of him. "Weren't you the leading lady in that play they put on at the workshop tonight?"

"Did you see it?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. "I always see them. Being a Yankee and getting something for nothing, I can't resist it." She smiled a little. "That's better," he said. "Now you don't look quite so forbidding and I can tell you that you did a good job in the play. A better job than most of the workshop actresses usually do."

"No, I didn't," she said. "I was terrible. I spoiled the whole last scene and . . . and now I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"That the whole summer will be wasted."

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said. "I thought you were fine."

"Didn't you notice that there was something wrong with the last scene?"

"The only thing I noticed in the last scene," he said, "was that when you kissed Paul, or whatever his name was, you looked as if you enjoyed it."

"You're kidding me," she said.

"No, I'm not. You made me almost wish I were up there in Paul's place."

"That's funny," she said.

"What's funny about it?"

"Oh, I was just thinking of something Captain Jelliff told me."

"I know what it was," he said. He got up and leaned against the side of the boat. "He said I was afraid of girls."

"How'd you know?"

"He tells that to everyone. It's only a half-truth."

"You mean, you aren't afraid of girls?"

"No, of course not. I just don't want to get tangled too deeply until I've done a few things I'd like to do."

"What, for instance?"

"Design some boats. Take a cruise to the South Seas."

"On your sloop?"

Peter started to smile and changed his mind. "No," he said. "I've got my eye on a two-masted schooner that would make the trip nicely. Now are you going to solve the mystery and tell me why you were crying?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"I wouldn't have stayed this long if I didn't."

"There's a girl in the workshop group who doesn't like me. We didn't hit it off from the beginning. She heard me tell a friend that my brother always sent me a bouquet whenever I was in a play at school." She reached down and took the box from her suitcase. "She left this in the dressing room for me tonight." He lifted

the bouquet of coal and weeds from the box and examined it with a puzzled expression.

"I come from a coal-mining town in West Virginia," she said.

"I see," he said. He was quiet for a while and then he said, "Know what I'd do with this?"

"What?" she asked.

"I'd drop it in the Connecticut River."

She got up, taking the bouquet from him, and stared at it. "But that won't change anything. She'll keep right on hating me."

"There was a fellow at school who didn't like me," he said. "He was a sophomore while I was a freshman and he made things pretty miserable for me at first. But I helped him get over it."

"How?"

"I kind of figured he must be pretty unhappy about himself or he couldn't dislike someone else as much as he did me. I kept on being decent to him no matter what he did and one day he asked me to do him a favor. You can't ask a favor of someone you don't like. Although he finished school last year, I still hear from him."

"But this girl's so spiteful."

"When people do cruel things like this," he touched the bouquet, "it's because they're frightened about something." He picked up Vicky's suitcase. "You know what I think?"

"What?"

"That you'd better come over to the store and have a soda with me. Tomorrow you'll see the whole thing in a different light."

"I don't think I could enjoy a soda right now."

"Better not refuse," he said. "I don't often treat a girl."

"I'd have to fix my face," she said. He pulled a flashlight from his pocket and played it on her mirror while she wiped off the grease paint.

"If I'm going to buy you a soda," he said, "you ought at least to tell me your name."

"Victoria Lind. Vicky for short."

"Vicky," he said. "That's a cute nickname." He tapped the bouquet with his finger. "Now, Vicky, be a good girl and dump that nasty thing overboard."

She walked over to the pier and hurled the bouquet into the dark water. It made a tiny splash and was gone.

Vicky shifted the cerise dress from one arm to the other and looked up and down the road before crossing. She had forgotten the dress when she returned her other costumes this morning. As she walked toward the workshop, she tried to whistle "Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair" the way Captain Jelliff did. Her attempt was comical and she laughed at herself.

She looked up at the mounds of white clouds, rolling mountains of clouds, against the bright blue sky. The sky is bluer here in Sunnycove than anywhere else in the world, she thought. She felt like the day, bright and shining. Mr. Litchfield had told her this morning that she was one of the three girls he had selected for minor roles in Sybil Shaw's first play. The play was to go into rehearsal on Monday. On Monday, too, the professional season would open at the Sunnycove Playhouse with Gloria Fenton starring. Her play would run all next week and Sybil Shaw's would be presented the following week.

Mr. Litchfield had commended her for her acting last

night in "Paris, Good-by." If he had noticed any let-down in her performance during the last scene, he had evidently decided not to mention it. Joan and Eric had assured her that she imagined it to be much worse than it really was. "You missed a cue and I filled in with a few lines," Eric had told her at breakfast. "That's all."

She stopped before a mailbox and pulled a thick envelope from her pocket. It was a letter to Gus. Dropping it into the box, she watched it disappear. The letter told Gus about her part in Sybil Shaw's play. "It's only a small one. About fifteen or twenty lines. And I'll only be on the stage ten minutes. But, Gus! In a professional play and before a professional audience. Can you believe it? I'd much rather have been in one of Gloria Fenton's plays, but I'm so grateful to have been picked at all that I don't care even if it is Sybil Shaw. They say she's hard to work with. Nothing ever pleases her. But what do we care?"

She hadn't mentioned Donna Russell to him. Donna was something she had to work out for herself. Neither had she told him about Peter. There was really nothing much to tell. Peter had bought her a soda and walked back to the Inn with her. The next time he saw her he would probably just say hello, and pass her by.

The rehearsal barn was dark when Vicky stepped in out of the bright sunshine, but she picked her way skilfully among the benches and chairs, stumbling over only one rocker. When she opened the door of the wardrobe room, she noticed a figure huddled on the large box they used for a stepladder. The halo of gold hair identified it as Donna.

Vicky, remembering the bouquet, churned with anger. She thought, What's she moping around for? She's usually out having a good time for herself.

Donna got up and left the room. Vicky relaxed. Carefully shaking out the cerise dress, she examined the skirt once more to be sure it was all right. As she reached for a hanger, she thought about her conversation with Peter Bradford. He'd said you could make people stop hating you. She thought, That might work with boys but not with a girl like Donna Russell. No one could change her.

She hung up the dress and went out into the main room of the workshop. Donna stood by one of the windows, staring moodily across the lawn. When Vicky had almost reached the door, she turned around.

"Hi, Bernhardt," she said. "I suppose you feel pretty self-satisfied now that you've been picked for Sybil Shaw's play. Nice break for you and those two from the American Academy."

So that's what's bothering her, Vicky thought. She turned toward the door but Donna came over to her.

"Why didn't you blat around about my presenting you with that bouquet last night?"

"Because I didn't think it was important enough," said Vicky.

"It was important enough to upset you in the last scene and make you skip the party afterward."

Donna stood between Vicky and the door. When she tried to step around her, Donna backed up against the door.

She sneered at Vicky. "I suppose you've figured it

out in your own quaint way," she said, "and have decided to be loving and forgiving."

"Since you insist on talking about it," said Vicky, "I'll tell you I thought it was a nasty trick, but it's past and there's nothing we can do but forget it. The sooner, the better."

"If there's one thing I can't stand," said Donna, "it's a coward."

"I'm not a coward," Vicky said hotly. "If someone hates you, what good does it do to hate them back?"

"What are you going to do? Love them?" Donna laughed. "Love!" She almost spat the word out. Her eyes were like slits. The emotion which twisted her face brought out the sharp contour of her high cheekbones.

She folded her arms across her chest and glared disdainfully at Vicky. "You think you're doing something wonderful to come up here from your coal-mining camp. You think you're a little genius, don't you?" She came so close that her breath was hot on Vicky's face. "Well, where do you think I came from? My real name is Julia Blanarik. I was raised in the Bohemian section of New York City. There were eight kids in our family with never enough room, never enough clothes to go around, sometimes not enough to eat. My brothers and sisters hated each other." Vicky backed away from her. She stepped forward again. "You can't believe that, can you, you and your darling Gus? But it's true. We hated each other!"

Vicky tried again to step around Donna but she grabbed hold of her. "You don't want to hear that, do

you? But you're going to listen. You're going to hear it all."

Vicky tried to pull her arm free, but Donna gripped it so hard it hurt. "All I've got is my looks, Bernhardt." Her mouth curled. "So I've decided to make the most of them. I've had to learn a lot. The right people to cater to. How to lie with a straight face and be nice to people you don't like. How to push and drive and shove your way ahead to get what you want. It isn't easy, Bernhardt."

Vicky turned away and Donna wrenched her arm pulling her around. A sharp pain shot up Vicky's arm and she stifled the impulse to cry out. "Don't be impatient. I'm almost through," she said. "I worked in the five-and-ten till I got my chance at modeling. Sometimes I had to work eighteen hours a day. I saved up enough to buy myself the right kind of clothes and come up here this summer. And now I'm going to get my break in the movies," she said with a last violent jerk to Vicky's arm. "I'm going to get my break before it's too late. And nobody is going to stop me."

She let go of Vicky's arm and walked over to the window. Vicky opened the door and stepped outside. It was a relief to draw in the fresh air. She looked down at her arm. Three red marks showed the strength of Donna's grip.

As she crossed the road, she thought about what Donna had said. She was like some of the people in the valley houses of Pittstown. They had no standards, nothing inside them to help them over the rough spots. Most of them believed that if they only had more money

they'd be perfectly happy. But they wouldn't be. Not any more than Donna would be, after she made her success in the movies and earned enough so she'd never be poor again. You couldn't buy happiness with money; Gus had made that plain to her lots of times.

Edgecomb's, the general store, was not so popular as the drug store across the street, but Vicky liked its country flavor. Her throat was dry and there was a bad taste in her mouth from the unpleasant encounter with Donna. She thought, I'll be reckless and squander a nickel on a coke.

Her arm still ached from Donna's wrenchings as she pulled open the screen door and walked in. The whole store was filled with cooking odors. Two business men were sitting in the booths at the side having a late lunch. Without looking at their plates Vicky could tell they'd had bacon and eggs and coffee. Sometimes she found Cap'n Jelly in here, but today his familiar figure in its faded blue coat, with chamois patches at the elbows, was not in sight. Vicky slid up on a stool at the end of the counter. The man behind it wiped his hands on his apron as he came over to Vicky.

"What'll it be, Miss?" he asked.

"A small coke," she said.

"Hot day," he commented as he reached for a glass and turned toward the row of shiny faucets.

A popular magazine lay near by. She leaned over and looked at the cover. "You can read it if you want to," said the man. "I left it there for the customers."

She picked it up and thumbed through the pages. Her

eyes suddenly rested on a familiar face. It was Sybil Shaw. The article told how she had just finished two pictures in Hollywood and had come here to Sunnycove for the summer. There were several poses of her, one in a costume she was to wear in her first play.

"Hello, Vicky. Taking a busman's holiday reading about the stage?"

She recognized the voice before she turned and looked up at Peter Bradford. He pointed a long brown finger at the magazine. "Quite a write-up they have about your leading lady. I read it."

"She's not my leading lady," said Vicky. "If I've got to take my choice it will be Gloria Fenton."

"I don't know," said Peter, slipping one leg lazily over the stool next to Vicky. "I think Sybil's quite a girl. I saw her in New Haven when she was on tour."

Vicky thought, You think you're so immune to women, Peter Bradford, but you're just like the rest. Bowled over by a pretty face.

She said, "Gloria Fenton's more genuine. She takes her acting seriously."

"Is that the way Victoria Lind takes hers?"

She got down off the stool. "It's the only way to take it. It's not the glamour profession lots of people think it is. It's an art. And it's hard work." She walked over to the door.

"Hey, wait a minute," Peter called. She turned and watched him grab a bag of candy and pay for it. He hurried over and held the door open for her. She ran down the steps ahead of him.

Peter caught up with her and walked down Captain's

Lane beside her. When they reached Skipper's Inn, she started up the walk. Peter took a few long strides and blocked her path. "How'd you like to go for a ride in that broken-down sloop of mine? I've got some supplies I promised to take out to a friend at Hidden Point."

Vicky thought it over. "Do you really want me to come? Or are you still feeling sorry for me the way you were last night when you bought me the soda?"

He grinned. "I really want you to come."

"All right," she said.

When they reached the dock, Captain Jelliff was sitting in his pew, whittling away on the model of the *Katrinka*. They waved and said hello.

"See you got yourself a girl, Peter Bradford," he boomed.

Vicky called, "He's taking me for a sail."

Captain Jelliff got up and stood with his legs apart. "By golly," he bellowed, "I can't believe it. I can't believe it even with my own two eyes. I've seen four schools of whales in one day, I've seen typhoons and sea serpents and phantom ships. I've seen the aurora borealis and the Taj Mahal. But, by golly, I never thought I'd see Peter Bradford take a girl for a sail."

Peter called, "Come on, Vicky. Don't pay any attention to that landlubber."

Vicky ran down the gangplank to the float. She paused. "I can't swim, you know. Maybe I should have told you before."

"Can't swim?" Peter looked at her as if she had said she couldn't breathe.

"We didn't have any place to swim in Pittstown."

"You'll be safe enough today," he said. "There's not much of a breeze and anyway I'm going to use the motor. But you certainly ought to learn to swim before the summer's over."

He held out his hand and she cautiously placed a foot on the cockpit seat. "I'd love to," she said, "but I haven't any bathing suit."

"Can't you get one? They sell them at the marine store."

She thought, If you knew that I have exactly fifteen cents a day for spending money, Peter Bradford, you wouldn't be so smart about suggesting that I buy a bathing suit.

Peter started the motor and headed away from the shore. He sat down in the stern of the boat and said, "Come on, sit down." Vicky watched him steer skilfully between the buoys and other boats. Soon they were out in the broad middle channel of the river and passing the wooded shore lines. A motorboat passed them and Peter waved to the crew.

"Is this Hidden Point?" she asked as the boat drew near a yacht basin in which a group of large, expensive-looking boats was moored.

"Gosh, no," said Peter. "I want to show you a boat I'd like to own."

"The one you're going to the South Seas in?"

"The one I'd like to go in," he corrected her. "There she is. That white one with the tall masts."

"She's beautiful," said Vicky.

Peter looked pleased. "Do you really like her?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "I'd like to take a trip on her myself." Peter slowly circled the schooner. She read the name on the boat—the *Nancy*. Then she read the names on the other boats in the basin, the *Carol*, the *Audrey*, the *Eunice*, the *Marilyn*. She asked him, "Are all boats named after women?"

"A lot of them are," he said.

They were out in the channel of the river before she spoke again. "What are the South Sea islands like?"

"They're just islands. Big ones. Little ones. Beautiful ones. Some barren and dirty, too."

"But I've always thought they were very romantic," said Vicky.

"They are. Crazy hodgepodge of people from all over the world. Natives and artists and just riffraff. And plenty of beautiful scenery." Vicky laughed. "What are you laughing at?"

"What on earth," she asked teasingly, "would a man do in a place like that without a girl?"

Peter picked up a bucket, dipped it into the river, and aimed it at her. She ducked just in time. "Hidden Point's around the next bend," he said, leaning on the tiller. A point of land jutted out into the river. Peter headed for it, slowing the boat down. He brought the sloop up to a floating pier attached to a crude dock and made her fast. "Want to come along?" he asked Vicky.

"I'd like to," she said.

He helped her out and handed her some groceries to carry. Their arms full, they walked along the path that led to a row of small, tidy-looking cottages. Fish nets, tackle and poles lay outside many of them.

"It's a hideaway for people who want quiet," he explained. "A writer lives in that one. Two schoolteachers live over there summers." He took the groceries from her. "I'll be with you in a moment," he said. "My pal lives in here."

He walked up the path to a small green and white bungalow and disappeared around the side. In almost no time he was back and asked, "Want to see my cabin?"

"Yes," she said. He led her up another path and through a small strip of woodland. A rough log cabin stood in a clearing.

"Golly," she said. "It's wonderful."

Peter beamed. "I built it myself. During my last year at High." He opened the door. Vicky stepped into an enormous room with a fireplace at each end.

"This is all there is to it," he said, "except for the kitchen at the back."

"Why, it's lovely. I expected it to be just . . . just any old furniture. But it's like a real home." She looked around at the green and red leather chairs, the striped draperies.

"My aunt helped me fix it up," he said. "And I don't mind telling you you're the only other woman who's ever crossed the threshold."

"I suppose I should feel highly honored."

"You certainly should," he grinned. He pulled out the bag of candy he'd bought at Edgcomb's and offered her some. They were gumdrops. She took a handful and stuffed one in her mouth.

"Why do you single me out from other girls?"

"You're different. The way you grabbed a handful of

those gumdrops. Another girl would have been afraid to take more than one. You took a handful and you're enjoying them. You think everything's wonderful—my sloop, and the boat I want to buy, and this cabin. You're not afraid to be yourself, Vicky. And I like it."

When Peter eased the sloop alongside the Sunnycove dock, Captain Jelliff was still there. He limped over and watched Peter make the sloop fast. As they came up the gangplank, his hearty voice rang out. "Glad to see you got back safe and sound, Vicky. I was kind of worried, you being out with this amateur seaman."

"We had a grand sail," said Vicky. She didn't tell him about seeing the cabin on Hidden Point. Peter might not like it.

Captain Jelliff turned to Peter. "See you ain't named the derelict yet, Peter Bradford."

"No," said Peter. "Not yet."

"What you waiting for?"

"The right name."

"Can't kid me," said the Captain. "You're afraid you'll have to name her after a woman."

"That's right," said Peter, humoring him.

"Huh," grunted the Captain. "No woman would want her name decorating that waterlogged old hulk."

Vicky tugged at the chamois patch on the Captain's elbow. "I don't agree with you at all, Cap'n Jelly," she said. "I should think any woman would consider it an honor."

Peter laughed. "That's one on the Bradfords' side, Cap'n Jelly." He turned to Vicky. "I've got to get some

more supplies. You can help me carry them back to the boat if you like."

The marine store was divided into three different stores, really, with the restaurant and fountain in the middle, the groceries at the front, and the marine equipment at the back. Short corridors separated each part from the other.

They went into the grocery department first and Peter ordered a long list of canned goods which he asked the attendant to put into two cartons. He gave the lighter one to Vicky. As they came out she said, "What's the rear department like? I've never been in there."

"Everything you can possibly imagine anyone would need on a boat. Want to have a look?" She nodded. Peter kicked open the door, holding it for Vicky. She stared around her at the variety of equipment. "The only thing I can call by name are the life preservers," she said.

"Here," he said, "let's put these cartons by the door and we'll make a tour of the place."

He led her around the store, pointing out the rudders, the masts, the different kinds of ropes and lanterns.

"It smells funny in here," she said.

"That's the oil on the machinery," he explained.

As they passed the counter where bathing supplies were sold, Peter said, "Why don't you get a bathing suit now?" She hesitated, wondering what to tell him. He misunderstood her silence and added, "I could take you over to White Sands some afternoon and get you started. There's a cove that's safe for beginners."

She thought, I might as well tell him. If I give the wrong impression, I'll be sorry later on.

"I can't afford one," she said bluntly. "My brother Gus pays my board and gives me a little extra. But I haven't anything for a luxury like a bathing suit."

Peter gave her a searching look and, turning abruptly, walked over to where the cartons lay. He picked up Vicky's box and handed it to her. As she walked out ahead of him, she looked up toward the restaurant just in time to see Donna Russell and Cheri Weston come out. Vicky turned away but Donna had already seen her. In a second Peter was next to her, hugging his large carton to him. Donna's eyes flashed over Peter. Vicky could tell she liked what she saw. Donna left Cheri and came over to them.

Ignoring Vicky completely, she turned her attention to Peter. "You're the boy that owns the good-looking sloop," she said, "aren't you? The one with the red sails?"

"Yes," said Peter. Vicky watched him. His bright blue eyes stared straight ahead; his mouth was unsmiling.

"It's one of the raciest boats in the harbor," Donna said. "I've been admiring it ever since I got here."

Peter's mouth turned up at the corners but Vicky couldn't tell whether he was amused or pleased by Donna's compliment. He said, "Come on, Vicky. Let's go."

Seaweed met them at the end of the gangplank. Peter scolded him as he scooped him up and dropped him into his pocket. When they were on the sloop, he let Seaweed out and the kitten ran up the mast, clawing at the lines.

Peter took the groceries from Vicky and started to put them away. She thought, Why doesn't he say something about Donna? Why doesn't he ask me more about her?

Then suddenly he paused with a can of peaches in one hand and a sack of potatoes in the other, and asked, "Is that the girl who presented you with the bouquet, Vicky?"

"Yes," she said. "How'd you guess it?"

"Doesn't take much guessing. She looks like the kind of girl who would do anything."

Vicky thought, Then her flattery didn't really impress you.

But his next sentence gave her something to think about. "She's a knockout for looks," he said. He shoved a can of peas on the shelf. "She's just about the most beautiful girl I've ever been that close to. What's her name?"

Every afternoon that week, Vicky went over to the Sunnycove Playhouse with Hope Esmond and Susan Howard to rehearse their scene in Sybil Shaw's play. A Broadway success of two seasons ago, it was the story of a fiery prima donna on a concert tour, who upsets the routine life of a small town. Obviously Sybil Shaw had chosen it because it was an excellent vehicle for her.

Hope and Susan were to play the roles of society women in the town and Vicky had the part of a music teacher, a spinster, called upon to substitute for the prima donna's accompanist.

During rehearsals, Sybil Shaw behaved like a lamb, and Vicky began to think that some of the stories about her must have been exaggerated. She was prompt for rehearsals and fairly responsive to direction. The director was Mr. Albert, a small, quiet man who, it was secretly rumored among the students, wore a toupee. He was patient and gentle, spoke only when he had something important to say, and then directly to the point. Vicky watched the deftness with which he handled the leading

lady and thought, If it weren't for his tact, I doubt that she'd behave so well.

However, on several occasions when Mr. Albert asked Miss Shaw to do some action differently, she nervously fluttered her eyelashes in disapproval. She would shake her tiger-colored hair and look at him from the corners of her heavily fringed eyes with cat-like slyness.

During the week the rehearsals progressed smoothly. Miss Shaw paid little attention to Hope, Susan, and Vicky. The girls took Mr. Albert's sensible directions eagerly; he was pleased with them and let them go as soon as the short scene in which they appeared was finished. Hope and Susan were glad to get off early because they always had a date for swimming or tennis.

Vicky had other plans for her afternoons. She would walk off by herself along one of the country roads around Sunnycove, taking her part with her. She wanted to be alone to think about the character of Mary Holister. Hope and Susan thought Vicky was overdoing it and told her so. "It's such a small part," Hope said to her. "It's all right to do the best you can, but you're carrying it to extremes, Vicky."

She didn't listen. She had found an ideal spot where she could be alone and think. It was an unploughed field next to a farm outside Sunnycove. She loved to lie flat on her back, looking up at the sky, listening to the cat-birds and thrushes call to each other, and drinking in the perfume of the clover and the sun-dried grass. She would reach out and pluck a long-stemmed Queen Anne's lace with a blossom large enough to be a small doily and, rub-

bing its delicate petals over her cheek, she would begin to think about Mary Hollister.

She asked herself all kinds of questions about her. First, of course, what did she look like? And what kind of childhood had she had, and had she ever been in love, and with whom, and why hadn't she ever married? She saw the piano teacher as a highly romantic woman who was a dreamer, a lover of adventure, but who had never been more than fifty or sixty miles from the town in which she lived. Thus the opportunity to play for the prima donna undoubtedly was the most important episode in her uneventful life.

During that week Vicky lived with Mary Hollister. She went, in her imagination, into Mary's house and touched every piece of furniture in every room. She sat down and talked with her, listened to Mary tell about herself, her unfulfilled aspirations and her secret hopes. She sat down at her table and ate her favorite dishes with her, dropped into a big armchair in her living room and looked at all her books, and listened to her play her favorite Sibelius and Chopin compositions on the piano. Vicky knew every article of clothing in Mary's closet. She sat beside her in the movies on Saturday nights and went with her to a little white church with a tall, slender steeple on Sunday mornings.

Vicky lay there watching the course of the sun, and when it reached a certain point just over the farmhouse weather vane, she knew it was time to leave Mary Hollister and go back to the Inn for dinner. She got up, brushed the dry grass from her blouse and skirt, and pulled a few stalks from her hair. She took one last

breathful of clover and grass, one sweeping glance at the sky and the muted yellows and greens of the meadows. Then she turned back to Sunnycove with a whistle on her lips.

On Sunday night the workshop students were invited to see the dress rehearsal of Sybil Shaw's play. Vicky went to the Playhouse with Joan and left her in the auditorium while she went backstage to get into her costume. She had selected it herself from the wardrobe room and she had shown it only to Mr. Albert for his approval. He had smiled slightly and commented in his gentle voice that her choice of a costume was "quite realistic." But he had said she might wear it.

In the dressing room which she shared with Hope and Susan she pulled the limp, old-fashioned dress over her head. It was a faded green chiffon with a full skirt and gathers at the waist. Her only ornament was a bright pink rose which she pinned to the shoulder of the dress. When she looked in the mirror, she caught Hope and Susan staring at her.

"Where'd you ever get that dress?" asked Hope.

Vicky told them. "It's dreadful," said Susan. "It makes you look like your grandmother."

Vicky glanced from her simple dress to their glittering gowns. "It's the kind of dress Mary Hollister would wear," she told them.

"Who cares what kind of dress Mary Hollister would wear?" asked Hope. "You'll only be on the stage ten or fifteen minutes and you've got to make an impression. There'll be producers and scouts in the audience."

"Hope's right," said Susan. "I believe in making an

art of acting, but you can look like Mary Hollister in something more attractive than that."

Vicky thought, I'm not going to argue with them. The dress is right and I know it.

They went out front. The students were scattered in small groups throughout the auditorium. Donna and Cheri, with Mark Forgan and Jack Trent, were seated about halfway up the center aisle. When Vicky looked at them Donna glanced away.

Vicky went back and sat with Joan. "It's bedlam," Joan said. "They haven't a thing ready. Sybil Shaw has her own stage manager and he's been bawling out Mr. Litchfield and the boys about the scenery. It was good enough for Gloria Fenton but it isn't good enough for Sybil Shaw. The electricians can't fix the lights to suit him. He wants a half-dozen more floods and two more spots. He's not satisfied with the furniture and props. The curtain doesn't open smoothly enough. Nothing's right, not even the air."

Vicky looked at the stage. The scenery was an attractive shade of rose, the sitting room of the prima donna's suite. "I don't see anything wrong with the set," she said. The stage, however, was in wild confusion. The furniture had been pushed to the center and there were stepladders everywhere. Electricians with rolls of wire and flashlights walked in and out among the disorder, shouting directions to each other. Mr. Albert and the stage manager were checking properties for the first act.

"It doesn't look as if they'll get started before midnight," Joan grumbled.

"They can't start until Miss Shaw gets here anyway," said Vicky. "She hasn't shown up yet."

Then, all at once, the confusion began to give way to order. The stepladders disappeared and the furniture was on spike. The electricians were gone and only Mr. Albert stood on the stage, patiently rechecking everything to be sure it was right. From time to time he glanced toward the back of the auditorium.

"He's looking for Miss Shaw," whispered Joan. "The rehearsal was supposed to begin an hour ago." Mr. Albert pulled out his watch and held it thoughtfully in his hand. In a few minutes he walked up the center aisle toward the box office. Vicky heard him talking to Mr. Johnston, the manager of the Playhouse. Then he came back and sat in the front row, still holding his watch in his hand.

The front door of the theater banged and there was a commotion in the foyer. Everyone in the auditorium turned around. Miss Shaw stormed in. She stood there, pushing her wild red-gold hair back from her eyes and glaring around her. Her maid came in. She held several freshly pressed costumes carefully in front of her. Sybil wheeled on the woman and spoke stormily in French.

Joan whispered to Vicky, "Whew! Is she mad about something!"

Mr. Albert walked calmly up the aisle. Sybil faced him angrily. "If you ask me why I'm late, I'll break every piece of furniture on the stage," she shouted. She pushed him aside and strode down the center aisle, shouting as she went. "These stupid, one-horse Yankee towns! There isn't an intelligent native in the place."

Mr. Johnston went down one side aisle and Mr. Albert down the other. They waited for her at the front.

"I lost my favorite dog this afternoon." She walked across the front row, banging her fist on the arms of the seats. "There isn't even a police force in the town to report it to. I don't think there's a single person in Sunnycove that knows what a Doberman pinscher looks like."

She stared out into the dark auditorium. "Who are all those people?"

"The workshop students," Mr. Johnston replied.

"They're not going to stay for the rehearsal."

"The workshop students attend every dress rehearsal of the Sunnycove Playhouse, Miss Shaw." Mr. Johnston spoke courteously, but it was clear that he was not afraid of her. "Your contract includes that clause."

"Contracts," screamed Miss Shaw. "Contracts were made to make fools out of actresses and rich men out of producers."

Joan leaned over and said to Vicky, "That's a joke. Everyone knows Sybil Shaw's the shrewdest business woman in show business. She practically writes her own contract. Even has final say on her cast."

Sybil favored Mr. Albert, Mr. Johnston, the stage, and the students with one sweeping glance of disdain. Then, shouting to her maid in French, she stalked off toward the dressing rooms.

It was fifteen or twenty minutes before she reappeared, with her maid tagging behind, trying to hook up Miss Shaw's pink satin gown. The maid fussed with the ruffles at the neck. Sybil Shaw stood it as long as she could and then screamed, "*Allez! Allez!* Get out of here, you

clumsy cow, before I lose my patience. I've had enough trouble for one day." The maid ran off the stage, holding her hands to her ears.

Sybil's throaty voice aimed its next missile at Mr. Albert. "Aren't you ready to begin? Do I have to wait all evening for the curtain to close?"

Mr. Albert quietly signaled to the crew off stage and the curtains swung together. In that moment of hushed silence that always precedes the beginning of a play, Vicky held her breath. There was a slight delay backstage and then the curtain swung open.

Miss Shaw paced the stage with catlike strides. She stopped abruptly and shot her first line with such vehemence that her leading man jumped.

Joan suppressed a giggle. Vicky whispered, "She shouldn't have done that."

Miss Shaw put all her pent-up anger into her powerful voice. Her husky tones shot out across the apron of the stage and crackled in the dark auditorium like electric sparks. She moved upstage and turned her back to the audience during an important speech. Vicky thought, She's not supposed to do that. She's disregarding all the rehearsed business. I wonder how long Mr. Albert will stand for it.

But Mr. Albert was already at the apron of the stage, talking to her. "Miss Shaw, that speech was to have been spoken down here by this table."

"So what?" asked Miss Shaw.

"Will you please take it over again?"

"I certainly will not."

"Yes, Miss Shaw. I think you will." There was a touch of impatience in his voice.

The actress's eyes rested insolently upon him and then she went back and played the scene as it had been rehearsed. A moment later, however, when she was supposed to walk up to her leading man and fuss with the flower in his lapel, she sat down instead on a couch, filled a glass with water from a pitcher near by, and offered it to him.

There were titters among the students as the leading man, obviously flustered, stared blankly from the glass to Miss Shaw's face.

Mr. Albert was at the apron of the stage again. His voice was calm but incisive. "Will you please go back over the business, Miss Shaw, and play the scene as we rehearsed it?"

Her long lashes fluttered. "I can't be hampered by third-rate direction in everything I do," she said. "I act by inspiration. If I get an impulse to put in new business, I do it."

Mr. Albert's back stiffened. "In my plays, Miss Shaw, we follow the business we rehearsed. We don't put in extraneous matter under the name of inspiration on the night of the dress rehearsal. It's not fair to the other actors. Now will you please do the scene again?"

"No," she said.

"I think you will," said Mr. Albert.

There was absolute silence in the auditorium. The students were on the edges of their seats, watching and waiting. Vicky thought, I had no idea that mousy little man could be so firm about anything.

Sybil's throaty voice rose to an uproar. "I won't play the scene again. I won't! I won't! And no dime-a-dozen director who ought to be glad he's got a job is going to order me around." She ran to the edge of the apron and called out into the darkened auditorium. "Where's Mr. Johnston? I want to talk to Mr. Johnston."

Mr. Johnston came down the center aisle. "What's the trouble?" he asked.

"I want a new director," she roared. "I can't work with this common hack."

"I'm sorry, Miss Shaw," said Mr. Johnston firmly. "Your contract does give you the right to a final check on your cast. But the Sunnycove management has complete say about the director."

Sybil uttered a few abusive comments about producers, directors, and agents. She turned and stormed from the stage, kicking over a chair that was in her way. Mr. Johnston went backstage, but Mr. Albert sat down and waited. In five or ten minutes Miss Shaw reappeared. She took up the scene and played it as it had been rehearsed.

Vicky thought, She reminds me of a tiger that's been driven into a corner and is simply waiting for another opportunity to attack.

At the end of the first act, the actress left the stage without waiting for the curtain to close. Hope and Susan got up and motioned to Vicky that it was time for them to take their places backstage. Joan said, "Watch your step, Vicky. I've never seen anyone as mad as that she-cat up there."

"I will," said Vicky. "Don't worry."

As she walked down the side aisle, Donna's voice followed her. "There she goes, gang," she said. "The Bernhardt of the coal mines. She's going up there to show us what real acting is." Donna laughed and the others joined in.



It was quiet backstage. Vicky stood alone waiting for the second act to begin. Susan and Hope had already gone out. They had to be on stage with Miss Shaw at the curtain. Vicky's knees trembled a little and she braced herself against the scenery. She thought, It's just because it's my first professional dress rehearsal. She looked over at one of the older members of the professional company who sat calmly reading a book under the best light he could find. She wondered if she would ever be like that.

The house lights went out. Vicky listened to the swish of the curtain as it opened upon the second act. Miss Shaw's gown rustled as she swept across the stage. Her husky voice shattered the silence and sent echoes through the auditorium.

Hope took up her cue and stumbled over her first line.

Sybil roared her next line. When she finished there was a blank silence. "Go ahead, Susan," Vicky said under her breath. "It's your cue." In sympathetic anx-

ity she clenched her fists as Susan floundered for her line and finally stammered it out.

For a moment Vicky felt the contagion of Susan's fear. It wasn't going to be easy to go out there and face the furious Miss Shaw. Her knees were so weak she felt she would have to sit down. She thought, I can't sit down. I've got to stand right here and listen for my cue. Her hands trembled and beads of perspiration seeped through her grease paint. Then she thought, Why, this is just Donna's bouquet in another form. It's trying to push me around, upset me so I can't do my best. I'm not going to listen to it.

That calmed her and she said to herself, "Forget about Vicky Lind. It's Mary Hollister that counts." She listened closely to the speeches. There's my cue now! she thought.

She was surprised at the poise with which she was able to walk out and face Sybil Shaw. The work she had done on the part stood her in good stead. In fact, she didn't see Miss Shaw at all. She saw a fiery prima donna, a woman who had come suddenly into Mary Hollister's little world and brought excitement with her.

"How do you do, Madame Giordano," she said. "I can't tell you in words how much the opportunity to play for you means to me."

Miss Shaw moved upstage, swinging the train of her blue velvet gown gracefully behind her. "You are a teacher here? Yes? You teach the little ones to play the piano?"

Vicky took the upstage position as Mr. Albert had

directed her to do. "Yes, Madame Giordano," she said shyly.

Miss Shaw opened her mouth to say her next line and stopped. She looked Vicky up and down. Walking over to the apron of the stage, she said, "Where's Mr. Johnston?"

Mr. Johnston got up from his seat in the third row and came forward.

"Who is this girl?" asked Sybil Shaw.

"One of the students," said Mr. Johnston. "I don't know her name."

"Her name doesn't matter," snapped Sybil. She flashed her blazing eyes over Vicky again. "Who does she think she is? Bernhardt?"

There was a snicker from the audience. Vicky thought, I know where that came from.

Mr. Johnston pulled out a white silk handkerchief and patted his face. "I don't see anything wrong with her. She seems to know her lines."

"Know her lines!" shrieked Sybil. "She not only knows them, she's living them." She swept Vicky's costume in a broad gesture of disgust. "Look at that dress." She came up to Vicky and pointed at the rose. "And that hideous flower. What does she think this is? The Moscow Art Theater?" She bent over the apron of the stage and roared at Mr. Albert. "What is this, a frame-up, putting in a smart kid to try to steal a scene from me?" She pointed an accusing finger at Vicky. "This girl's trying to outplay me and I want her taken from the cast."

"It's too late," said Mr. Johnston. "The show opens tomorrow night."

"It's a small part," Miss Shaw shouted back. "Anyone could learn it overnight."

"I could learn it overnight."

Miss Shaw straightened up and, shading her eyes against the glare of the floodlights, searched the auditorium. Mr. Albert and Mr. Johnston turned around and looked at Donna. She stood in the center aisle, her pale blonde hair shining in the dark. No one spoke for several moments. Then Sybil Shaw said, "Come up here on the stage where I can see you."

Donna came down the center aisle. She crossed to the steps and came quickly up them. Sybil and Donna stared at each other like two animals measuring each other's strength.

"How would you play the part of Mary Hollister?" Miss Shaw asked Donna.

Donna's eyes were oblique and calculating as she thought it over. "I'd play it straight," she said. "It certainly doesn't deserve the emphasis," she jerked her head toward Vicky, "she's giving it."

"Are you a quick study?"

"Yes," said Donna. "I learn fast."

"Good." Sybil Shaw spoke to Mr. Johnston. "I want this girl to replace the other one."

Mr. Albert came forward. "Excuse me," he said, "but I can't agree to that. I find Miss Lind entirely satisfactory."

"You shut up," bawled Sybil Shaw. "I've taken

enough from you. My contract gives me the right to a final say on my cast. Doesn't it, Mr. Johnston?"

Mr. Johnston shrugged his shoulders. Even in the dim light that shone on his face, it was clear that he was upset by Miss Shaw's antics.

"I'm sorry to say it does," he said grimly.

"Then this one goes." She pointed at Vicky. "And the other girl gets the part."

Mr. Johnston and Mr. Albert talked together in low tones. Vicky stood there with her fists clenched at her side. She thought, It can't happen. They just can't be so unfair.

Mr. Johnston came over to the stage and coughed twice. Vicky looked at him without moving.

"I'm very sorry to have to do this," he said. "But if Miss Shaw requests that you leave the cast, we'll have to ask you to withdraw."

Vicky didn't answer him. The theater which a moment ago had shaken with Sybil Shaw's voice was gloomily silent. Through the open windows the rasping chant of the katydids reached Vicky's ears. She looked over at Miss Shaw, but the actress's back was turned to her and all she could see was the magnificent blue velvet gown and the sharp outline of Sybil's upswept tawny hair.

She turned and somehow or other managed to get across the stage without stumbling over anything. She pushed open the door of the set and walked into the darkness backstage with the insistent call of the katydids following her.

Back in the dressing room, Vicky sat down at the disorderly make-up table and looked in the mirror. Mary Hollister in her faded chiffon dress looked back at her. Automatically she scooped up some cold cream on her fingers and smeared it over her face. Reaching for a box of tissues, she wiped it off. From association she was learning to loathe that sickish smell of stage make-up. First it had been Donna's bouquet. Now it was Sybil Shaw.

She got up and pulled the dress over her head. The rough edges of the pink rose brushed against her face and tangled themselves in her hair. She put on her own skirt and waist and looked in the mirror. She was Vicky Lind again.

A wave of discouragement swept over her. She slumped down on her chair and throwing her arms upon the table buried her head in them. The liners and sticks of grease paint pressed hard against her forearms. She shoved them aside. There was an emptiness inside her as if she hadn't eaten for a week.

Suddenly she wanted to talk to Gus about it, to tell him what had happened. She thought, Even if I could afford it, I couldn't reach him by telephone. But I can write to him, I can send it special delivery. I'll tell him the whole story and ask if he thinks I ought to come home. Because there isn't any use in my staying here.

Quickly she threw all her belongings into her suitcase and snapped it shut. She hurried out of the stage entrance and ran across the road, the suitcase banging against her legs. By the time she reached the Inn the bag was a dead weight in her hand and her arm ached. Slowly she climbed the steps and went into the front hall. Miss Sniff moved about her office, but Vicky didn't even glance that way. When she was halfway up the front stairs, she heard her name.

"Miss Lind."

She kept on going up.

"Victoria Lind."

She turned. Miss Sniff stood at the foot of the stairs in her white taffeta gown with the lace frill at the throat.

"Has something happened?" Miss Sniff asked.

Vicky's thoughts were so blurred that Miss Sniff's small features seemed to fade into each other under the crown of white curls. "I can't stop to talk," she said. "I've got to write a letter to my brother."

Before Vicky could get away Miss Sniff was up the stairs. She took Vicky's face between her hands. "Goodness gracious, child! You're burning up. You come right down to my office and no nonsense about it."

Vicky was surprised at the strength with which Miss Sniff held her hand and forced her down the stairs. In

the office Miss Sniff pushed her into one of the oval chairs and said, "Now tell me what happened."

The events of the evening rushed back. Miss Shaw's angry eyes blazed so realistically before Vicky that she blinked. "I don't want to talk about it," she said. "Not to anyone but Gus."

Miss Sniff bent over her. "You're one of my girls," she said. "And I have the right to know what's got you so upset."

"Miss Shaw had me removed from the cast of her play," she said.

Miss Sniff sat down, erect and alert, with her tiny hands clasped firmly together in her lap. "Can she do that? Did they really take you out of the cast?"

Vicky nodded. "Miss Shaw's contract gives her the right."

Miss Sniff sat forward. "Why did she do it?"

"She said I was trying to steal a scene from her."

Miss Sniff cocked her head on one side. "Well, it's nonsense. Just plain common ordinary nonsense."

"I'm going to ask my brother if he wants me to come home," said Vicky. "There isn't any use in my staying here."

"So you're going to give up just because Sybil Shaw had a fit of temperament and took it out on you."

"You don't understand, Miss Sniff. I've had nothing but trouble ever since I came here." The bars were let down and Vicky didn't care what she said. "First, Donna Russell turned most of the students against me because I come from a coal-mining town. And the other night she left a box on my table before I went on for

the last scene in 'Paris, Good-by.' When I opened it I found a bouquet. It was lumps of coal and weeds. With a nasty card saying it was from my brother." Vicky got up and walked over to the window. "And now this tonight," she said. "I just don't think I can stand it."

"So you're going upstairs and write a self-pitying letter to your brother. After all he's given up to send you here." Penelope Sniff's head was high and her blue eyes blazed. "The first time something really goes wrong you turn your back on him, ready to give up. If you've really got the stuff in you to make an actress, unfair treatment isn't going to set you back. You've got to learn to stick it out. Can't you see you must be good or Sybil Shaw would never be afraid to have you in her cast?"

"Afraid?"

"Yes, afraid. There's an old saying the boys throw sticks at the highest apples on the tree. Can't you see that's what's happening to you?" She grabbed Vicky's shoulders and shook her. "Wake up, child! Nothing can keep you down if you don't let it. Nothing!"

Vicky stared at the woman. In spite of her tiny frame, there was so much strength to her she seemed to tower above Vicky.

Vicky's voice choked as she said, "Thanks." She could feel the tears coming and turned away.

Miss Sniff's arm was around her shoulder. "Go ahead and cry," she said gently. "It's a way we women have of bending before a storm. Like trees in a gale. The ones that bend and let the storm ride over them come through. The rigid ones snap off. So bend before the wind, child, and come up stronger than ever."

The midday sun streamed through the windowpanes of the dining porch. Vicky watched the sunlight set fire to the ruby-colored water glasses. She had come in late and eaten alone because she didn't want to talk to anyone about last night. Josie brought her dessert, then turned her attention to setting the tables for dinner.

Ordinarily Vicky would have eaten the strawberry pudding with relish, but today her thoughts were so filled with the events of last night that she simply picked around the edges. Because of her talk with Miss Sniff, she had not written the letter to Gus. However, Miss Sniff had not been able to lift the burden of frustration that had settled down on Vicky. All during classes this morning Donna Russell had teased her about losing the part in the play. "Thanks, Bernhardt," she said, "for giving me the break I needed. There'll be scouts in the audience all week. All I wanted was the chance to be seen."

Along with Vicky's disappointment went chagrin over what Donna would do to the part of Mary Hol-

lister. She wondered how they were ever going to make the glamorous Donna look like plain little Mary Hollister.

Vicky took another spoonful of pudding and watched Josie's quick, efficient movements as she brushed off the tables and put down fresh place mats and silver. She looked around at the cheerful furnishings and then outside at the sweep of green lawn and the huge old trees, some of which had been there longer than the houses. Shutting her eyes, she pictured the smoky air and soot-covered shacks in the valley of Pittstown. She thought, I don't believe I could ever go back.

Getting up, she waved to Josie and went out on the porch. The grounds of the Inn were deserted. The other students were rehearsing for their next play, from which she had been excused because of her part in Sybil Shaw's play. She had nothing to do and the afternoon dragged endlessly before her.

She turned toward the dock, hoping Captain Jelliff would be there. When she reached the pier, she spotted his blue coat in the distance. The shad fishers, through with their nets for the season, sat outside their headquarters, mending them. Captain Jelliff's booming voice supervised the job.

Vicky did not want to intrude, so she walked out to the edge of the pier. When she saw Peter Bradford come out of the cabin of his sloop, her heart beat faster. Seaweed, halfway up one of the masts, spied her and miaowed. He started down, his claws catching in the lines. He was up the gangplank before Peter saw him.

"Hey, you!" he called. "Come back here." He ran

after Seaweed. Vicky and Peter both stooped down to pick up the kitten at the same time. As they held Seaweed between them, Peter's strong hand clasped Vicky's. "Where've you been all week?" he asked.

She let him have Seaweed and he put the kitten down, shooing it toward the float. "I was rehearsing in Miss Shaw's play."

"The one that opens tonight?" She nodded. "Well, that's fine," he said. "That's a real break."

"It was," she said, sitting down on the pier.

He sat down beside her. "What do you mean, it was?"

"Last night at the dress rehearsal I was asked to leave the cast."

His blue eyes were serious as they turned upon her face. "Why?"

"Miss Shaw said I was trying to steal the scene from her."

He was smiling now. "Were you?"

"Of course not. I was simply playing the part the best I could."

Peter stretched out full length on the pier and folded his arms under his head. "Who'd they put in your place?"

"Donna Russell. At Miss Shaw's personal request."

Peter whistled softly and ran his hand through his shock of sun-bleached hair. "That wasn't a bit nice of Miss Shaw."

There was a comforting quality in his voice that urged her to confide in him. "Last night I was so discouraged that I wanted to give up and go home. I was going to write a letter to Gus and ask him if I could, but Miss

Sniff stopped me. She made me see that was the very thing I shouldn't do."

"Miss Sniff's right," said Peter.

"It's easy enough to tell others what to do," said Vicky. "How would you feel if you were in my place? I've probably lost my one big chance. I've made such a mess of my first part Mr. Litchfield won't give me another."

Peter sat up. "Seems to me, Vicky Lind, you've got a pretty negative way of looking at the whole thing."

"I don't know what you mean." She stood up, annoyed at Peter's remark. "I said I had decided to stay, didn't I? I'm not giving up."

Peter got up too. "I'm not so sure you aren't," he said. "You're showing courage, but it's an unconvinced kind of courage. You're staying here but you've really given up."

"How can you say that?"

"You believe you've got ability as an actress, don't you?" She nodded. "And yet you believe there's a power that can keep you from making a success. That's just plain superstition and it's silly."

Vicky turned her back on him. She thought, Having Peter Bradford preach a sermon to me after all I've been through is more than I can stand. Gus had chided her often, but gently and with sympathetic understanding. This was different. Peter was more nearly her own age and he was not her brother. His criticism hurt.

Peter tugged at her sleeve. When she didn't turn around, he took hold of her arm and made her face him. She looked past him at the boats on the river.

"Come on," he said. "Cheer up. What if you have lost one opportunity? There'll be a hundred others."

He broke into the long, slow smile that so transformed his angular features. "And now come on down to the sloop. I've got something to show you." As they went aboard, Seaweed ran out of the cabin and jumped at Vicky's ankles. "I think he likes you," said Peter.

The kitten followed them into the cabin and jumped up on the bunk. Peter reached behind a pillow and pulled out a brown paper package. He handed it to Vicky.

"What's this?" she asked.

"Open it and see."

She broke the string and unwrapped the paper. It was a bathing suit, a shiny white one with red and blue flowers splashed all over it. She looked at him, not knowing what to say.

"It's for you, Vicky, so you can learn to swim." When she didn't answer, he asked, "Don't you like it?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "It's one of the prettiest I've ever seen. I was just wondering where you got it."

He took the wrapping paper from her and folded it carefully. "Those direct questions of yours, Vicky," he said slowly, "are the kind that embarrass a fellow." He picked up the piece of string and wound it around his fingers. "But I expected you to ask that question so I cooked up a lot of fancy answers. Now I think I'll toss them all aside and tell the truth." He put the string and the paper on the shelf. "I bought the suit myself."

"It's lovely of you," she said, "but I couldn't pay you for it, so you'll have to return it."

"I can't return it," Peter said. "No exchanges on bathing suits."

"I'm sorry, but I can't take it."

"You're not going to take it as a gift," he said. She looked at him, puzzled. "Ever hear of a Yankee horse trade?"

"Yes, I think so. Isn't it a name for a bargain?"

"It certainly is. Every Yankee thinks he's the world's best bargainer and I'm no exception."

"But what could I possibly have that you'd want in exchange?" she asked.

He leaned over and swept Seaweed up in his hand. The kitten chewed on his fingers. "If you'll let me have your name, I'll let you have that bathing suit. I'd like to call my sloop the *Vicky*."

Warm blood rushed through Vicky's neck and face. The heartbreak of last night, all the disappointments she'd met at Sunnycove, melted away. Peter wanted to name his boat after her. The boat he'd rebuilt himself. Why, it was the highest compliment he could have paid her.

She smiled. "You're awfully nice, Peter Bradford," she said.

"Golly," he said, "you've done it at last."

"What?" she asked.

"Called me by my name. I'd begun to think you never would."

She kept her eyes carefully focused on one of the splashy red flowers in the bathing suit. "I didn't dare," she said. "I thought maybe you'd think you weren't so safe with me after all."

“There’s a young man downstairs who wants to see you.” Penelope Sniff’s eyes sparkled with humor as she stood at the door of Vicky’s room.

“Is it Peter Bradford?” Vicky asked.

Miss Sniff’s eyes twinkled more brightly. “Now that you mention it, he does kind of favor the Bradfords as to nose and mouth.”

“Thanks,” said Vicky. “He’s going to teach me to swim. I’ll be right down.” Miss Sniff’s sprightly steps hurried down the hall. Vicky took one more look in the mirror at her new bathing suit. She spoke to the reflection as if it weren’t herself at all. “Well, your face is nothing to brag about and your permanent is a sight, but you can be grateful for one thing. Your figure isn’t so bad.”

The bathing suit fitted her perfectly, and she smiled as she thought of Peter not only selecting the suit but managing to get the right size. Picking up her coat from the bed, she pulled it on and ran through the maze of narrow corridors. Peter, with a sweat shirt over his trunks,

stood by the bulletin board in the front hall and read the notices.

"Hello, Peter Bradford," she called when she was half-way down.

"Hi, Vicky. Let's go. The tide's high."

Peter took her arm as they ran down the front steps. He steered her toward the open roadster at the curb and helped her in.

"I thought we were sailing over," she said.

"No, the moorage isn't good at White Sands. And I thought you might like to see the countryside for a change."

Vicky settled back against the leather seat. "It's the first time I've ever ridden in a roadster," she said.

Peter started the car. "There are a lot of first times for you this summer, aren't there?" He turned the car up Captain's Lane.

"Yes, and the funny part of it is I'm getting so used to it that it seems as if I'd never known anything else."

They were soon out of the village, driving through open country. Vicky drank in the fragrance of fresh-cut grass, of hay drying in the sun. She watched the tawny and amethyst sweep of meadows spread out like quilts to dry beneath the sun. She listened to the insistent call of the crows and watched their dark flight down toward the treetops. She sat forward on the seat, unwilling to miss a single thing. They passed a farmer and his boys at work in a field of hay. Her eyes lingered in admiration on the spick-and-span whiteness of New England farmhouses hugged by sprawling barns and tall silos.

Peter slowed up the car as they approached the center of a town. "This is Old Beacon," he said.

"Old Beacon," she repeated. "That's where Donna Russell and her crowd go to dances on Saturday nights."

"Probably. They have square dances that draw quite a crowd from all around here. They've got one of the best callers in the state." He turned down a side road. "White Sands isn't very far away."

Long before they reached it, the smells of the beach came forward to greet them. There was more salt in the air here, with an unmistakable hint of crabs and clams and lobsters. At last the pale beige crescent of sand stretched ahead of them.

"Why, it's beautiful," she cried. "It's just like its name. White Sands!" She could hardly wait until Peter parked the car. Jumping out, she ran across the dirt road and grassy stretch to the beach itself. Peter was close behind her, carrying their towels and a blanket. "How I wish Gus could be here, just to see it this once!" she said.

"We'll go around to that little cove there." He pointed past a row of houses built up to the water's edge. "It's more private and safer for a beginner."

Although it had a good sandy stretch of beach, the cove was much smaller than White Sands. A few mothers had brought their children over here. Vicky and Peter walked around a trio of little boys building a sand city and ducked as a beach ball hurled by one small girl to another just missed their heads. Peter led the way down to the far end where they could be alone.

"This will do," he said. Vicky helped him spread the

blanket on the sand. He threw down their towels and pulled off his sweat shirt. When Vicky took off her coat, she expected he might say something about her bathing suit. But he just looked at it and kicked off his shoes. He walked down to the water and she followed him. She stood at the edge and watched him run in. He struck out in a bold Australian crawl, swimming with the same effortless ease with which he managed his boat and drove his car. She thought, Isn't there something you don't do perfectly, Peter Bradford?

He swam out so far she thought he had forgotten all about her. But at last he circled a lobster stake and came back. A few yards from shore he stood up and shook the water from his hair and ears.

"It's warm," he called. "Ready for your first lesson?"

She looked at the water. There was so much of it that it discouraged her. She took a step or two toward it and stopped. Then she looked up at Peter standing with his hands on his hips, watching her. She thought, I can't let him know I'm afraid.

She stepped forward into the water. It was freezing cold on her feet and sent sharp stabs of cold up her legs. She shivered and her teeth chattered. "I thought you said it was warm," she called to him.

"It is after you're in. Get wet as soon as you can."

She stepped in a little farther and started to shiver again. "It's still freezing!"

"Rub some water on your arms and wrists," he called. "Like this." She reluctantly obeyed.

Then she thought, This is silly. I can't stand here all day. Peter's right here and he's certainly not going to

let anything happen to me. She walked in up to her waist.

"That's the way," Peter encouraged. Her teeth chattered so hard she couldn't control them. "Duck in," he said. "It's the only way."

She tried to shout, "Here goes," and couldn't. She let herself slowly down into the water. It felt so cold she wanted to run back to shore.

"Splash around!" Peter shouted. "Keep moving."

She followed his instructions, and began to feel a little warmer, but it was quite a few minutes before she stopped shivering. Peter was beside her now, holding on to the back of her bathing suit. "Lie on your stomach," he said, "with your face in the water."

She thought, I can't. I'm afraid. But she did as he told her to.

"Kick your feet up and down," he ordered. "No, not like that. Like this." He grabbed hold of her feet and pushed them up and down. "Keep them under water. There, that's it. Good. That's much better." He pushed the water away from him with one arm. "Move your arms like this," he said. "That's it."

Peter clutched her suit tightly and walked beside her as she swam along the beach. "It's fun," she gasped. "I like it. And the water feels almost warm now."

"I told you it would. Don't work so hard. Take it easy."

She paddled a little farther and sputtered, "I'm tired."

"All right," he said. "You've done very well for the first lesson. Class is dismissed."

He helped her stand up and held her hand until they

reached shore. He said, "You'd better stretch out on the blanket and dry off."

Vicky lay down and shielded her eyes from the sun. Peter pulled a pair of sunglasses from the pocket of his sweat shirt. "Better put these on," he said. He sat down on the blanket and rolled over on his stomach.

Vicky drew in a deep breath of salt air. The sun felt warm and good. Two sea gulls flew overhead, screeching to each other. She watched them as they dipped over the water and finally disappeared. The voices and laughter of the children lulled her into a half doze. Then someone near by turned on a portable radio to a program of popular music. Peter started humming one of the tunes. Vicky lay very still. If she moved he might stop.

He touched her arm and she opened her eyes. "I thought you'd fallen asleep," he said. "Sing the chorus with me."

"I haven't as good a voice as yours," she answered. But she joined him anyway.

The radio band swung into another tune and Peter followed it while Vicky picked up the words from him. They sang another and another until the program was over and a commentator came on.

Suddenly Peter sat up and said, "Tell me about your brother. About Gus."

She eagerly told Peter about the little school and the boys' club, about how hard Gus worked and how much he had done for her and for others. "He's very smart. Next year he's going to teach in a Philadelphia high school."

Peter shifted his position. "He sounds like a fellow who'd be worth knowing."

She sat up and clasped her hands around her knees. "He's more than that. Gus is a great man." Peter turned and squinted up at her. "Not great the way most people mean it," she explained. "Great because he's willing to give up things himself so others can have them." She reached out for a handful of sand and let it trickle through her fingers. "That's real greatness."

"Isn't being an actress like Vicky Lind's going to be, real greatness, too?"

He was probably teasing but she answered him anyway. "No, that's success. Greatness is not what you do for yourself. It's what you do for others."

He was still squinting at her. There was a smile in his bright blue eyes, in spite of the seriousness of his face. "Vicky," he said, "I'm glad every girl isn't like you."

"Why?"

He thoughtfully made ridges in the sand with one of his long fingers. "You've got depth," he said. "You think. A man might lose his notions about his own self-sufficiency if he found many women like you." He wriggled to a sitting position and then jumped up. "Let's go," he said. "It's getting late."

Back in the car, Peter spread the blanket over the seat to protect the leather from their damp suits. As he turned the car back toward Sunnycove, he hummed one of the songs they had been singing.

Vicky thought, I've never had so much fun before. But I don't dare tell him because he'll think I'm angling for another date.

As they passed through Old Beacon, Peter nodded to the right. "That's where they have the barn dances every Saturday." She glanced up the dirt road and caught sight of a large gray building. "I like square dances," he continued. "I drop in there once in a while, but I suppose a future actress wouldn't be interested in anything like that."

"Why don't you ask her sometime and find out?" she said.

He glanced at her quickly and then, as he turned back toward the road, he burst out laughing. "You're delightful, Vicky," he said. He chuckled quietly to himself as he drove on.

Vicky thought, I haven't the faintest notion what I said that struck him so funny. But who cares? It looks as if I'm going to get another date.

On Thursday evening the students were given free passes to Sybil Shaw's play. Joan coaxed and coaxed until Vicky said she would go.

The lobby of the theater was filled with people who were waiting to see if there would be any cancellations. "Sybil Shaw always sells out the house," whispered Joan as the girls made their way through the crowd. Joan led the way up the stairs to the row of seats reserved for the students in the balcony. The girls managed to squeeze in at the end of the pine bench. Joan said, "It's really a thrill just to be here."

Vicky nodded and looked around her. The theater was filled with the usual hum of voices that precedes a performance. It was a warm night and the place was stuffy even though every exit had been opened. Large moths flew in and circled around the lights. Through the open door, too, came the sweetness of wild honeysuckle.

Joan nudged Vicky and pointed with her program to a noisy party in evening gowns and dinner jackets walking down the center aisle of the orchestra. "They're

from New York, I bet," she said. "Might even be some scouts in the party."

The house lights dimmed and an expectant hush fell over the audience. Then the curtain swung gracefully apart, revealing Sybil Shaw in her brilliant pink satin gown. She was standing with her back to the audience. Suddenly she turned around and strode across the stage, her gown swishing against the furniture. Her husky voice poured out over the apron of the stage and filled the house. The play was a comedy. From the spontaneous roars of laughter it was clear that the audience thoroughly approved of Miss Shaw.

Joan whispered, "She's in rare form tonight and they love it."

Vicky didn't answer. She thought, She puts too much of herself into her acting. Everyone else in the cast is just a foil for her. That isn't art.

However, in spite of her disapproval, Vicky watched with interest. It was fascinating to spot the variety of dramatic tricks the actress had accumulated: that affected turning over and over of her right hand just before she gave another actor his cue, that ever so slight lipping of an "s" when she wanted to point up a speech, that poise of her head just a little to the side when someone else was talking, that sweeping gesture of her arms toward the ceiling, making her tall figure statuesque, that trembling of the lip and quivering of the nostrils. They were all just plain tricks.

When the curtain closed on the first act, the audience applauded enthusiastically. Joan said to Vicky, "Want to go see the show outside?" Vicky grinned. It was a

standing joke among the students that the scene on the lawn during intermissions was as colorful as the plays.

When they stepped outside, they were cooled by a breeze from the river. "My, that feels good," said Joan. "Look over there." She nodded to the stone wall at the left on which young couples sat with their arms around each other while they drank soda pop. A noisy babble of conversation filled the air, and lightning bugs darted crazily in and out of the groups of people. Over everything lay that heavy sweetness of the honeysuckle.

"I wonder who the people are around the well," Vicky said.

"Don't you know?" asked Joan. "The tall man is Mark Forgan's father. Mark introduced Donna to him this afternoon and she was bragging about it afterward."

"Who's the little man with him?"

"Chad Shippan, the famous director."

"I suppose they're scouting," said Vicky.

"Yes," said Joan. "Miss Shaw's giving a party for them tonight. She invited the cast."

"Then Donna's going." The cowbell rang and they turned back toward the theater.

"Of course," said Joan smiling. "Try and keep her away!"

"Well, there's one thing about Donna," said Vicky. "She knows what she wants and makes a beeline for it."

Joan couldn't answer because the crowd in the foyer was thick and a large man stepped between them. They reached their seats just as the house lights dimmed.

Vicky wriggled nervously. She thought, This is the second act. This is Mary Hollister's big moment. To

keep her hands from trembling she clasped the program tightly between them. Sitting forward in her seat, she listened for the cue. She was no longer in the audience. She was backstage waiting to go on.

She thought, There, that's it. That's my cue. She had to grip the seat to hold herself down.

The door of the stage set opened and Donna walked on. Vicky sat bolt upright, shocked by what she saw. Donna wore a bright yellow evening gown of some soft clinging material. With her pale gold hair, her affected walk and posture, she resembled an animated gilded statue. Vicky thought, Why, it isn't Mary Hollister at all. It's just Donna Russell.

She listened to the familiar lines as Donna spoke them. To Donna, Mary Hollister was someone to make fun of. The mockery showed in every word and gesture. Then Vicky saw why Donna hadn't been able to get inside the part. It wasn't just that she didn't know how. It was that she didn't want to. She had no sympathy in her.

Vicky thought, I can't stand it. I can't sit here and listen to her mutilate the part like that. She turned to Joan and whispered, "I'm going outside." She got up and went as quietly as she could down the stairs. The foyer was deserted and the box office was closed. She walked out into the cool night air. Halfway down the walk, she heard footsteps and turned to see who it was. Joan had followed her out.

"What's the matter?" asked Joan as she caught up with her.

Vicky kept on walking. "I couldn't stand it," she

said. "I couldn't sit there and watch what she was doing to Mary Hollister."

Joan grabbed hold of Vicky's arm and stopped her. "Why, Vicky Lind," she said, "you're actually shaking."

"I can't help it," said Vicky. "I'm mad. Mary Hollister was a real person to me. I got so I knew her and it was just as if Donna Russell were hurting a friend of mine."

Joan shook her head. "Vicky," she said, "you're a funny girl. You take your acting so seriously."

"You'd better go in and see the rest of the show," said Vicky. "I'm going down to the river."

"I'll go along," said Joan. "Let's get a coke in the marine store. I'm thirsty."

They were the only customers in the store. A tired-looking woman stood behind the counter and asked them irritably what they wanted.

"I'll have a lime coke," said Joan.

"Make mine plain," said Vicky.

While they were drinking their cokes, Captain Jelliff limped in. "Hello," he shouted to Vicky. "How's my actress girl friend?" He bellowed at the woman. "Want two big bottles of root beer and don't tell me you ain't got none. I saw two cases delivered this afternoon."

The woman disappeared into a cubbyhole at the back.

"You hanging around because you think that Bradford boy might show up?"

Vicky blushed. "Of course not. It's cooler down here."

The woman slid two bottles of root beer across the counter to the Captain and he slapped down a handful

of small change. He said to Vicky, "Heard how Peter Bradford's teaching you to swim."

"I've had a lesson every day this week," she said.

Captain Jelliff screwed up his mouth and raised his eyebrows in a knowing grimace. "Want to watch out for them serious, hard-to-get ones, Vicky. When they fall, they fall hard. Might spoil that actress career you got mapped out for yourself." He boomed, "Good night," and limped out before she could answer.

Joan and Vicky swung off the stools and left the store. As they went across the pier Joan said, "Captain Jelliff's quite a character, isn't he?"

Vicky didn't answer, but Joan was not so easily silenced. "I've often wondered if an actress could make a success of marriage and her career at the same time," she said. Still Vicky didn't reply. "I'd never let any career stand in the way of marriage," said Joan.

"It's different with you," said Vicky.

Joan paused under the light outside Skipper's Inn and faced Vicky. "Please don't be angry at what I'm going to say," she said. "But I can't help thinking that you and Donna Russell have something in common."

"Something in common!" Vicky exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes. Donna's crazy about money and thinks if she makes enough of it, she'll be happy. She'll do anything to get it."

"I don't see what that has to do with me," said Vicky.

"With you it's the drive to prove that you can be an actress. You'll never be happy unless you prove you can do it. I'm not so sure that it's good to be pushed around



like that by any idea. I think we ought to be masters of ideas, not their slaves."

Vicky turned up the path to the Inn, walking a little apart from Joan and scuffing her feet in the grass that bordered the path. When they reached the porch, Joan grabbed the knob of the screen door but Vicky sat down in one of the rockers.

"The mosquitoes will eat you up," said Joan. She opened the door and then closed it again. "I hope you aren't hurt by what I said."

"No," said Vicky slowly. "I'm not hurt." Joan went in and Vicky sank deep into the rocker, gripping the arms with her hands.

No, she wasn't hurt. She was shocked. Shocked that Joan should have put her in a class with Donna. Donna was cruel and unscrupulous. Joan was wrong. There wasn't the slightest similarity between them at all. Joan had just been talking the way girls will when they get started.

During the next week, Vicky felt very much left out of things. The rest of the students were busy getting ready for the production of their second workshop play, which would be given that Wednesday. As usual, there were properties to find, last-minute rehearsals of difficult scenes, and the exciting adventure of choosing the right costumes.

At the Playhouse, Gloria Fenton's second play had replaced Sybil Shaw's. Miss Shaw and her cast rehearsed every afternoon for the play which would be given next week. Eric, Frank Fowler, and Renee Larue had small parts in Gloria Fenton's play, and for Sybil Shaw's Mr. Litchfield had again chosen Hope and Susan. Vicky watched them longingly as they rushed through lunch every day and hurried over to the Playhouse for rehearsals.

Hope and Susan brought back stormy reports from the Sybil Shaw rehearsals. She and Mr. Albert were more unfriendly than ever. Scene after scene was stalemated because of differences of opinion between them, and

there were times when Miss Shaw became so violent that the rehearsals had to be stopped altogether.

Gloria Fenton was just the opposite. Eric and Frank told the other students she was so willing to take direction that she didn't seem like a star at all. To the girls at Skipper's Inn she showed the same modest qualities. Her clothes were simple and youthful, playsuits and inexpensive cotton dresses, low-heeled shoes, ribbons in her hair which made her look like one of the students. Whenever she passed the girls she would gaily call, "Hello," and she always remembered their names. If she had the time she would stop for a chat. Some of the girls became quite friendly with her. Vicky, however, shied away from any lengthy conversations with Miss Fenton. Not that she didn't want to talk to her; she longed to do it, but whenever she had the opportunity her tongue turned to a lump of dough in her mouth and her feet carried her in the opposite direction before she could do anything about it.

Once she talked it over with Joan Scott. "I don't know what's the matter with me. There are so many things I'd like to ask her, but I'm afraid to open my mouth when I see her."

"That's silly," said Joan. "She's nice."

"I'd love to ask her some questions about how she overcame her weak voice and her awkwardness. She had a lot against her when she began."

"Don't be afraid," said Joan. "People who've made good love to tell others how they did it. Especially when they've come up the hard way."

"I wish she'd tell me how to get a new face," said Vicky.

Joan was thoughtful. "You know, Vicky," she said, "you don't need a new face. You need more confidence in the one you've got."

"If I had Donna Russell's face," she said, "how easy everything would be."

Donna was riding high these days. Mark Forgan's father, after seeing her in the play, had arranged for her to take some screen tests. She was to go to New York for them on Saturday. Now that Hollywood was beckoning, the students flocked around Donna more eagerly than ever. Even Hope and Susan, who had kept somewhat aloof from Donna's crowd, were friendly and attentive. Well informed about theatrical matters, they discussed Donna's potentialities among themselves.

"She's a natural for the movies," said Hope. "Her voice is satisfactory and they'll take the phoniness out of her speech. It won't matter a bit that she can't act."

"That's right," said Susan. "She's got personality and looks and plenty of appeal. They'll get a good director to put her through her paces, make her do it over and over until it's mechanically perfect."

"It won't be acting," said Hope. "But it will look all right on the screen."

"It's happened a hundred times with others," said Susan. "With Donna's hair and the interesting bone structure of her face and those big purple-blue eyes she'll be a gold mine for them. They'll put her in technicolor and she'll be big box office."

Donna, confident that she would click, was making

plans for her career. "I'll save most of what I make," she said. "None of these big houses with swimming pools for me. Not at first, anyway. I'll save and invest and save and invest until I make so much money I'll never have to worry again."

Vicky, hearing the speech, thought, That's Julia Blarik who was raised in the Bohemian section of New York talking.

Joan, standing by, said to Donna, "You'll have all your relatives on your doorstep if you make that much money."

A sneer twisted Donna's face. "Not me," she said. "No one helped me get where I'm going and no one's going to horn in on the fruits."

Vicky thought, And she thinks she's going to find happiness that way.

Peter turned his roadster into the parking lot outside the Old Beacon Stable. While he helped Vicky out, a clap of thunder rumbled in the distance.

He opened the trunk of the car and pulled out two yellow slickers. "I thought we might need these before the evening was over," he said. "I took them off the *Vicky*." He held her arm and guided her between the cars. A flash of lightning cut across the dusky sky. "Maybe I should have brought boots, too," he said. "This place is a mudhole after a heavy rain."

An elderly man sat at an old-fashioned kitchen table near the door and collected the admission fees. His helper grabbed Vicky's left hand and stamped the date on her palm. She stood aside and waited for Peter to get his change and have his palm stamped, too. The dancing had already started. She could hear the scratching of the fiddle and the thumping of the bass viol. The air was sultry. She thought, It's not a comfortable night for a square dance.

Peter helped her over the rough path that led to the

Stable. The group of boys around the exit parted to let them through. A few of them spoke to Peter. Peter explained to Vicky, "They work at the Bradford Boat Works."

Inside the barn Vicky and Peter stood by the refreshment stand and watched the set. Pop Robinson, the manager, came over to get a bottle of soda. He stood beside them, drinking it thirstily in quick gulps. "It's going to be a bad night," he said to Peter. "Don't like the sound of that thunder. It means business."

Up in the balcony Lefty Burch, the caller, sang his commands:

"Swing your partners when you meet,
Oh, swing the girl that is so sweet."

"Got my hands full tonight," Pop Robinson said to Peter. He pointed toward the doorway. "Crowd out there from the Sunnycove Boat Works." He turned his sharp eyes on Peter. "Recognize any of your uncle's help?"

"Yes. Some of the Jelliff crowd, too."

Pop Robinson shook his head. "Some bad actors amongst them. Had trouble with them early this season. Told them to get out and stay out. But if they pay their admission they got a right to come in."

"I don't think they mean to make trouble," said Peter. "Just a bunch of girl-crazy kids, that's all."

"Maybe you'll have to help me out," said Pop Robinson. "If any of the boys from the Bradford Works get too fresh, you tell them to behave themselves. They got respect for you."

"All right," said Peter.

Lefty Burch's voice rasped the ending of the dance. "When you get home, you swing your own, swing your partners all!"

A crash of thunder punctuated his call. A girl slipped and screamed.

Lefty Burch announced the last dance in the quadrille. "I've been asked for 'Little Adam, Little Eve.'" The boys whistled and cheered. A few of the girls groaned. "There'll be no rough stuff," Lefty continued. "The first two fellows that lift each other off the floor, the dance stops." He gave a signal to the orchestra and they played. "Bow to your partners," he said. "Bow to your corners."

"What's a 'Little Adam, Little Eve'?" Vicky asked Peter.

He leaned down and spoke close to her ear. "The girls swing the girls and the fellows swing the fellows. The object is to see who's got the most strength."

"I bet it's fun."

"Sometimes the boys try to throw each other," he said. "That's why Pop Robinson's so alert."

Vicky looked over at him. He stood with his arms akimbo, his mouth stretched into a tight line, ready for the first sign of anything disorderly.

Lefty Burch sang:

"First lady out to the couple on the right,
Swing Little Adam, swing Little Eve.
Swing old Adam before you leave."

The girls swung in the usual manner, one of them tak-

ing the man's position, but the boys were really comical. They grabbed each other by the elbows or took a firm grip on each other's wrists and whirled around. Vicky thought, I can see why Pop Robinson is watching so closely. Almost anything can happen in such a rough dance.

As they danced the final promenade, a jagged flash of lightning colored the whole sky. Then the rain started, coming down in large drops that bounced like pebbles upon the roof and against the sides of the building. Pop Robinson was at the exits now, getting some of the boys to help him close the huge doors. As soon as they were shut, the air became stuffy and the odors of horses and hay and old leather seemed to be brought out of forgotten corners.

The closing of the doors had brought the crowd from the boat works into the Stable. They gradually mingled with the others, stopping here and there to tease a nice-looking girl.

Vicky was standing with her back to the doors, talking to Peter, when a wave of excitement passed through the crowd. She turned around. Donna Russell and Cheri Weston stood in the doorway. To protect themselves from the rain, they had thrown blankets over their heads. They laughed as they pulled the blankets off and shook the water into tiny puddles at their feet.

Donna had taken her screen tests that afternoon and had evidently come out here from the station. She had on a black jersey that clung to her figure and a tight little toque that hugged her head, showing off to good advantage the pale gold of her hair. Her high-heeled slippers

and long black gloves were smart but decidedly out of place.

With Cheri and Donna stood a tall, good-looking boy. Vicky liked his face. It was sensitive and fine. But she didn't like the proud way he looked at Donna.

"Who is he?" she asked Peter.

"Bill Bojowski. His father's Polish. They've got a farm outside Sunnycove."

"He looks interesting," Vicky said.

"Yes, Bill's a fine kid. I knew him quite well in high school. Next year he's going to State. Taking agriculture so he can improve his father's farm."

Vicky thought, Donna looks heady. She's pleased with herself now that her screen tests are over.

To attract attention Donna flirted with Bill. Vicky was sorry for him. He didn't seem to realize that Donna was making a fool of him. Donna was in his arms, dancing to the modern music they played on the phonograph during intermissions. She looked provocatively up at him, fluttering her long eyelashes, smiling sweetly. Bill danced like a boy in a dream, as if he didn't know there was anyone else there but Donna and himself. An outburst of laughter from a crowd of stags drew Vicky's attention. They were watching Donna and Bill and whispering among themselves. Then they laughed again.

"They're cooking up something," Peter said.

One of the boys left the crowd, threw back his shoulders, and started across the floor toward Donna and Bill. He tapped Bill on the shoulder and said something. Bill looked at him and blinked his eyes as if he were trying to wake up. He turned his back on the boy and danced

with Donna to the opposite side of the floor. In a few moments another boy walked out on the floor and tapped Bill on the shoulder. This time Bill stopped for a moment, angrily shook his head, and whirled Donna away. Another boy and another tried the same thing. The whole crowd caught on to what was happening and edged up to the dance floor. When a fifth stag walked up to Bill, he stopped and shoved the intruder back. The boy staggered three or four feet before he got his balance. By then Bill had moved on with Donna. The boy followed them. Donna stopped. She spoke angrily to Bill and turned her back on him. The next moment she was dancing away with the other boy. Bill stood there in the middle of the floor, his fists clenched, his eyes never leaving Donna. He did not move from the spot until the music stopped and all the couples left the floor. Then he went over to Donna and stood silently beside her.

Pop Robinson walked out to the middle of the floor and started making up the sets for the next square dance. Most of the couples quietly found their places. Peter scanned the crowd in his unhurried way. At last he grabbed Vicky's hand and hurried over to one of the sets. Vicky looked at the other couples in surprise. They were Donna and Cheri and two of the boys who had tried to cut in on Donna and Bill a little while ago. Peter spoke to the boys, calling them by name. Vicky guessed they were from the Bradford Boat Works.

Donna said, "Well, if it isn't Bernhardt!" She smiled at Peter, but he was looking straight ahead as if he didn't see her.

Pop Robinson, filling in the sets, moved nearer to

them. He spied the empty space in their square and shouted, "Need another couple over here. Shake the calluses off your feet, some handsome lad, and come on in."

Bill Bojowski broke free of the stag line. He stood at the edge of the floor, staring at Donna. Suddenly he turned around and, grabbing the girl nearest to him, he pushed his way across the floor. "We'll fill that place," he called, never taking his eyes off Donna.

Pop Robinson felt that something was wrong. He looked from Bill to Donna to the two boys from the Bradford Boat Works, trying to make out just what was the matter. His eyes held Peter's for a moment as if to say, "I'm expecting you to take care of this." Then he moved on to the next set.

Up in the balcony the bass viol player twirled his instrument and made everyone laugh. Then he plucked the strings and the pianist struck a chord. Lefty Burch stuffed his red shirt into his trousers and sang, "Honor your partners. Honor your corners."

Vicky bowed to Peter, but she could not take her eyes off Bill Bojowski's handsome, troubled face. She thought, It isn't healthy, the way he stares at Donna.

The caller sang:

"How in the world can the old folks tell
It ain't gonna rain no more?
The two top couples right and left
And the two side couples swing.
Two side couples right and left
Two top couples swing.
Take your own partners now
And promenade the square."

Vicky got mixed up and had to attend to her calls instead of Bill. The dance was over and nothing had happened. By now the barn was so warm most of the boys took off their jackets and loosened their ties. Some of them even rolled up their shirt sleeves. Then, all at once, Bill left his partner and walked over to Donna. Two bright spots of red burned on his cheeks. "You're going to dance the next one with me," he said. "I brought you here."

Donna's eyes slanted and her head shot up. "I didn't ask you to."

"Just the same you came with me," said Bill.

"I wouldn't have," said Donna, "if anyone better had been around."

Bill's shoulders hunched. He looked as if he would grab hold of Donna and shake her. But the boy who was Donna's partner stepped between them. "Can't you see she doesn't want you around?" he asked.

"You keep out of this," said Bill. "She's my girl. I brought her here."

The boy looked at his friend and winked. "She's anybody's girl," he said.

Cheri Weston gasped. Even Vicky held her breath. Maybe he didn't mean it the way it sounded, but it was a dreadful thing to say, even about Donna.

"You apologize for that," said Bill.

Donna stepped up. "Go away, Bill Bojowski," she said. "You're spoiling everybody's fun. Go on home."

Bill looked at her. Lefty Burch's voice came over the loud speaker. "What will you have next?"

"'Bumpsa Daisy,'" someone shouted.

"'Little Adam, Little Eve.'" Other voices joined in, taking sides. Vicky watched Bill. He walked back to his partner but he still stared at Donna.

A clap of thunder punctuated the demands of the dancers. The rain pelted down again. "It's hailing," someone shouted. "It's going to rain all night."

"'Little Adam, Little Eve.'" The voices chanted their request, stamping the floor in time to their chant.

"We've already had one of those tonight," said Pop Robinson. "That's enough." He moved anxiously around the floor, trying to stop the shouting and the stamping.

His protest only served to urge the crowd on. "'Little Adam, Little Eve,'" they shouted.

Pop Robinson shrugged in disgust. "All right," he called up to Lefty Burch. "Give them what they want and shut them up. But the first sign of roughhouse, out goes the whole boat works crowd."

They cheered and booed. Lefty started the dance.

"All eight balance and all eight swing,
A left allemande
And a right hand grand.
Meet your partner and promenade eight
Till you come straight."

Vicky watched Donna and Bill. Then suddenly a thought struck her. Bill would have to swing Donna's partner. She thought, They oughtn't to, not the way they feel about each other. She wanted to say something to Peter, but there wasn't time. Lefty Burch sang on.

"First lady out to the couple on the right,
Swing Little Adam, swing Little Eve."

Vicky watched Bill. He had reached out and grabbed the boy's wrists before he had a chance to stop him. He whirled him around and around until the boy's feet were off the floor. The boy yelled. Pop Robinson was beside them shouting, "Stop it! Stop it!" Bill tried to stop but he was going so fast he couldn't. He lost his grip and in an instant the boy was whirling across the floor. He struck Donna and she went down, rolling over on her face. Lefty Burch's voice broke off in the middle of the next call. The orchestra scraped to a stop. The big hall was as silent as it had been noisy a moment before. Everyone was looking at the inert form of Donna. Her black toque had come off and rolled beside her. Her pale hair was spread out fan-shaped about her head.

Peter and Bill Bojowski knelt beside her. Peter turned Donna over and looked at her face. He looked up at Pop Robinson. "I think we'd better get her to a doctor," he said. "Her face is badly cut."

Vicky thought, Her face! Donna's face! The crowd drew back, pushing her farther away from Peter. Bill and Peter lifted Donna up.

"Put one of those blankets over her," Peter said. He nodded toward the two blankets Cheri and Donna had dropped on a chair when they came in. Cheri, white and frightened, followed Peter's instructions. She walked beside them to the door. Peter looked back.

"Where's Vicky Lind?" he asked.

Vicky called through the crowd, "I'm back here."

"You come along with us," he said. The crowd parted and Vicky followed the group around Donna.

It was raining hard. She remembered the yellow slick-

ers and ran back for them. When she got outside again, Peter and Bill Bojowski were putting Donna in the back seat of a sedan parked close to the Stable. Vicky guessed it was Bill's car.

"Where do you want to take her?" asked Bill as he climbed behind the wheel. His voice was all choked up.

"Dr. Sheridan," said Peter. "He lives on our street in Sunnycove."

Vicky looked at Cheri. She was sitting next to Donna staring down at the tangled mass of blonde hair. Then she put her face in her hands and broke into violent sobs.

Peter grabbed hold of Vicky and pushed her into the front seat. He climbed in after her.

A fork of lightning flooded the parking space with light. Thunder rolled and growled all around them, but Vicky paid no attention to it. She was listening to Cheri's sobs and thinking about Donna's face.



It was hot in the workshop barn.

No one felt very lively this morning. All day yesterday they had nervously awaited news of Donna, and last night they had stayed up late watching the rehearsal of Sybil Shaw's play.

Now Miss Dyson began criticizing a pantomime which Goodloe Buffum and Hope Esmond had just given.

Vicky pulled a wrinkled envelope from her pocket and looked at her name and address written in Gus's tall, slanting hand. Keeping her eyes on Miss Dyson, she edged the letter out. She had already read it twice since it came this morning, but there were a few sentences she wanted to read again.

Quietly turning over the pages, she found what she wanted. "I don't have to tell you how pleased I was to hear about your part in a professional play. It will be fine experience for you to work with Miss Shaw and you're quite right not to mind if she's temperamental." Vicky looked out of the window at the bed of zinnias

and marigolds. Two white butterflies flitted among the brilliantly colored flowers.

She thought, I'll have to write to Gus and tell him that I was put out of Miss Shaw's play. Oh, how I wish I had some good news to offset it, even a part in the workshop play Mr. Litchfield's going to cast this morning, the last one of the season. She shoved the letter back into the envelope and put it in her pocket.

She looked over at the empty chair next to Cheri Weston. Donna had not left her room since Saturday night and she had not permitted anyone but Josie or Miss Sniff to bring up her food tray. Not even Cheri was allowed in the room. All day yesterday the students had hung around the front porch waiting for Dr. Sheridan to go in or come out, as if they expected to get some information by watching him.

Joy Wilson claimed she had caught a glimpse of Donna through the half open door. She said Donna's whole face was wrapped in bandages and part of her beautiful hair had been cut off. Renee Larue said she had heard Donna arguing with Dr. Sheridan, telling him she wanted to leave the Inn at once. Goodloe Buffum said he had heard Miss Sniff say that Donna's face would be permanently scarred, but when they questioned Buff closely he wasn't *sure* that's what he had heard. Vicky thought she would go down to the pier this afternoon and wait for Peter to bring his boat in. Peter would know the facts. He was a friend of Dr. Sheridan.

She sat up and tried to concentrate on the new pantomime which Leslie Gray and Bette Lee were doing, but her thoughts kept returning to Donna. She had really

caused the accident by the way she had tormented Bill Bojowski, leading him on one minute, pushing him away the next. But Vicky wasn't happy about the heartbreaking anticlimax to Donna's screen tests. You couldn't be glad about a thing like that even if it happened to your worst enemy.

Miss Dyson finished criticizing the pantomime. She got up and stuffed her notebooks and papers into her briefcase just as Mr. Litchfield came in. He dumped an armful of play books on the table and mopped his face. "It's hot," he said, with the friendly smile they all liked so much.

Goodloe Buffum was already at the table, turning over the books. He read the title. "'Ginger,'" he shouted. "Our new play is 'Ginger.'" He grabbed Mr. Litchfield's arm. "It's a comedy with a male lead! Do I get the part?"

"What makes you think you could do it?" asked Mr. Litchfield.

"I'd knock them cold," Buff said. "I'd roll them in the aisles."

Vicky thought, I hope he'll give me a good part. It's just about my last hope. He'll never pick me for a part in a professional play again.

Mr. Litchfield gave Buff the books and told him to pass them out. Then he perched on the end of the table in his favorite pose. "'Ginger's' a bright comedy," he said. "A good windup for your season at Sunnycove." The students buzzed among themselves as they glanced over the cast. "If you're willing to rely on my knowledge of your ability," he continued, "I'd like to cast the play

without tryouts. It will save a lot of time. How about it?"

Most of the students nodded.

He picked up his copy of the play and ran his eyes down the names in the cast. "I'll select the boys first," he said. "If I give you the part of Ginger, Buff, will you promise not to overact?"

"I'll do anything you ask me to," Buff eagerly replied.

"All right," said Mr. Litchfield. He cast the rest of the boys' parts and then turned to the girls. "Now, young ladies," he said, "you're next." He took his time, looking around at them as if he were trying to make up his mind. "I think I'll give the part of Ginger's mother to Enid Cooper."

Vicky thought, That's fair. Enid does play a mature part well.

"I think Bette Lee and Joy Wilson could do the parts of Ginger's sisters." He paused and looked around again.

"Renee Larue speaks several languages and she'll do well with the dialect of the Italian neighbor." He went over to the water cooler for a cup of water.

Vicky thought she wouldn't be able to stay in her seat. He turned from the cooler and said, "The three remaining parts are those of Ginger's girl friends. They're the most important girls' parts in the play and will have to be carefully worked out."

Joan nudged Vicky. "I'll bet he'll give one of them to you."

"These three girls have to be good foils for Ginger and striking contrasts with each other," said Mr. Litchfield. He came back to the table and set down his cup of water.

He loosened his necktie and took off his coat, carefully folding it over and laying it on the table. "I've decided that Joan Scott with her southern background could play the clinging-vine girl very well."

"Me?" Joan gasped the word. "You're going to give me a good part like that?"

"I'd like a tall girl for the sophisticated friend," Mr. Litchfield went on. "I think Cheri Weston could do that part."

Vicky thought, That leaves one part for Hope and Susan and me.

"It isn't easy to decide on this part," he said, "but I'm giving it to Hope Esmond."

Vicky slumped in her chair. Not even a walk-on or a bit with one or two sides.

Mr. Litchfield started them on a reading rehearsal. Vicky sat at the edge of the group and tried to follow the lines. She couldn't. Instead she looked out of the window and thought about the letter she would have to write to Gus. She would have to tell him that she had been put out of Miss Shaw's play and Mr. Litchfield had lost faith in her and the whole summer had been a waste. It would break Gus's heart, but he wouldn't let her know, and that would make it even harder for her.

Vicky recalled Donna's mocking remarks the first night she had been here. Donna had seen that hard work and talent weren't enough, that you had to know the ropes and have plenty of contacts. The more she thought about it, the more discouraged she became.

She fidgeted in her chair. Reading rehearsals were a bore even when you were part of them, but today the

endless drone of voices was almost unbearable. She wanted to get up and run out of the workshop. But at last Mr. Litchfield said, "I think we'll stop. It's only half-past twelve, but you've worked hard. I'll let you off early."

The chairs scraped along the bare wooden floors as they moved them back into place. Vicky listened to snatches of chatter around her. The cast was arranging for extra rehearsals in the old apple orchard. Even Joan seemed to have forgotten all about Vicky in her enthusiasm over her part.

"I'd like to talk to Victoria Lind." The request came as such a surprise that Vicky looked over to be sure Mr. Litchfield had really made it. He was beckoning to her. She went over to where he stood by the window. Heat poured in through the screen. Vicky listened to the chirping of the crickets and the long, trilling call of a bird.

Mr. Litchfield looked out of the window at the bed of zinnias. "I suppose you thought I'd forgotten all about you," he said.

Vicky couldn't answer. She watched the white butterflies flitting above the brilliant flowers.

"Miss Fenton spoke to me about you this morning," he said, "just before I came over here." Vicky stared into his pleasant face. "She saw you in 'Paris, Good-by' and she was so much impressed by your ability that she asked if I would let you play a small part in 'All My Life.' She's winding up the season here with it." Mr. Litchfield flipped the pages of his play book. "You'll

S U N N Y C O V E

begin rehearsals this afternoon. That is, if you want the part."

"If I want the part?" she cried. "You don't know how much it means to me! You have no idea!"

He looked out of the window again and his eyes seemed to be following those two silly butterflies chasing each other in and out of the zinnias. "You're wrong, Victoria Lind," he said. "I think I have a very good idea how much it means."

When Vicky got back to the Inn, Peter's roadster was parked out front. She hurried up the steps and flung open the door, expecting to find him waiting in the hall for her. Miss Sniff was flitting back and forth between the kitchen and the front dining room. She called to Vicky, "If you're looking for Peter Bradford, he's upstairs with Dr. Sheridan in Donna Russell's room."

Vicky stood there, unable to move from the spot, staring up the stairs as if they were enchanted. Why should Peter have gone up to see Donna? It had been all right for him to take her to Dr. Sheridan's Saturday night but this was different. She grabbed the polished mahogany banister and climbed the stairs. When she reached the second floor, she heard voices at the end of the corridor. The door of Donna's room was open. She was tempted to listen to what they were saying but turned and went to her own room.

She took Gus's letter from her pocket and laid it on the bureau. All the way home from the workshop, the prospect of writing to him about her part in Gloria Fenton's

play had been like a song within her. Now all she could think about was Peter down the hall talking with Donna Russell.

When she came out of her room to go down to lunch, she almost bumped into Peter. He was dressed in his sailing trousers and blue sweater.

"Hello," he said. "Where you bound for?"

"Lunch."

"Would some ham sandwiches and chocolate cake taste good to you?"

"Why?"

"My aunt packed me a lunch and I thought it might be fun to share it," he answered. "We could go over to Rocky Harbor. I've got a thermos of soup, too."

"I have to be back by two-thirty," she said. "There wouldn't be time to sail wherever you're going and back."

"Rocky Harbor," he said. "You don't sail there. You drive."

"Oh, I didn't know." She decided to tell him. "I've been given a small part in Gloria Fenton's next play."

"Congratulations! That's fine." He held out his hand and she took it. His clasp was firm and warm. "How about it? Want to go on a picnic?"

"All right," she said. "But I'll have to tell Josie first."

They reached Rocky Harbor by turning off the main road and driving through a wooded stretch of land. Peter parked the car and helped Vicky out. He led her along a short sandy stretch where the grasses grew almost as tall as themselves. Finally they reached a promontory of rocks.

Peter looked at Vicky's shoes. "Game to climb out on the rocks?" he asked.

"Sure. It would be fun."

Peter walked before her, jumping from one rock to another and turning to help her over them. They came out upon a large flat rock that made a natural table. Peter spread out a blanket and Vicky sat down. The air was damp on her cheeks, salty on her lips. An overcast sky made the water a deep greenish-gray.

"It's like a desert island," she said, watching Peter take sandwiches and a thermos bottle from his knapsack.

He unwrapped a sandwich and held it out to her. "I thought you'd like it." He poured the soup into an aluminum cup and handed it to her. "I used to play pirates here when I was a boy."

It was tomato soup, piping hot, and it tasted good. Peter, his mouth full, stood up and pointed to a cluster of cedar trees. "You can't imagine how many ships I looted and how much treasure I buried in that grove."

A flock of gulls swooped down over the water looking for something to eat. One of them lighted on the farthermost rock. Vicky leaned forward to watch it. She thought, How can anything so beautiful in flight be so ugly when it's at rest?

Suddenly Peter stood up and bent over a small loose rock just beyond the one on which they were sitting. He pulled it up. "Come here," he called. "I'll show you something."

In the cleft of the rocks lay a dark object. Peter lifted up a carved box. He raised the lid and brought out its contents, laying them side by side on the table rock.

"This was my pirate's hat," he said, pointing to a large-brimmed black hat. The white skull and crossbones on the front had partly chipped off but Vicky could still make out the design.

Holding up a wooden dagger, he explained, "Cap'n Jelly carved this for me on my seventh birthday. And this red sash is made from a real China silk dress my grandmother wore."

From the bottom of the chest Peter scooped out two handfuls of costume jewelry—necklaces, earrings, bracelets, green with age. He held them out to Vicky. "My buried treasure. Salvaged from the castoffs of my aunt and her friends."

He sat back on his heels. "Gosh, I forgot," he said.

"What?" asked Vicky.

"I made a solemn vow, sworn in my own blood, never to show this to any girl but the one I intended to marry." He laughed as he put the things back in the chest. He dropped the chest between the rocks and kicked the loose slab back into place.

He sat with his legs crisscrossed and pulled her down next to him. For a moment they watched the whitecaps break upon the rocks and listened to the raucous cries of the gulls.

"Vicky," Peter said, "I want to talk to you about Donna."

She thought, So that's the reason for the picnic.

Peter went on. "She's so depressed that Dr. Sheridan can't do anything with her. She's got the idea that her looks are gone forever. Dr. Sheridan said she's got to work with him or he can't help her. He says that in a

case like Donna's the patient's mental state is the most important thing. That's why I came over to the Inn today—to see if I could cheer her up.”

“She's got a lot of friends at the Inn,” said Vicky. “Why should Dr. Sheridan pick on you?”

“He didn't. I called him up to ask about Donna. He told me how depressed she was. Said she wouldn't let any of her own crowd in to see her. So I volunteered to see what I could do.”

“Just what did you think you could do?” Vicky asked.

“I thought maybe I could get her out of her room. She ought to be downstairs mixing with the others. Making a hermit of herself is the worst thing she can do.”

“I didn't know you cared that much about Donna Russell,” Vicky said.

“I don't care about her at all. But she's in a jam and I'd like to help her out. Vicky”—Peter's voice was serious now—“I think what Donna needs more than anything else is another girl to talk to her. Someone like you. You've had plenty of practice in keeping your chin up.”

Vicky reached down between the rocks and pulled up a piece of kelp. She pressed the slimy seaweed between her fingers, breaking the air-bubbles. “If Donna won't listen to you or Dr. Sheridan, what good would it do for me to talk to her?”

“I think it would do a lot of good,” said Peter. “She knows how you've stuck it out here this summer when all the odds were against you.” In his eagerness he put his hand over Vicky's. “It's got to be someone who's

proved what she's talking about. Otherwise the words wouldn't mean a thing."

Vicky snapped one of the bubbles in the seaweed. "She doesn't like me," she said. "She wouldn't even let me inside her room."

"Sure she would. What do you say? Will you try it?"

Vicky got up. She felt the sliminess of the seaweed between her fingers. "I wouldn't know what to say."

"Oh, yes, you would. Women are like that. They know what to say to help each other."

She watched one of the gulls swoop down and dive into the water. He came up with a small fish in his mouth. He flew off, another gull screaming in pursuit. Vicky thought, Donna's like that gull. All her life she's known what she wanted and gone after it and not been willing to share it with anyone.

"I'm sorry," she said. "If you'd asked me to do anything else, I'd have been glad to."

Peter was silent for a moment. When he spoke, his voice was no longer warm and friendly. "I thought you were different from most girls, Vicky. But today you seem hard. You seem almost as hard as Donna Russell."

He stooped and picked up his knapsack. Without another word he started back across the rocks. He didn't even turn to help her. She watched Peter. Gus had once told her you could tell more about a person from the way he walked away from you than anything else. Peter was jumping over the rocks as if he never wanted to see her again. She snapped the last bubble in the piece of kelp and threw it down between the rocks.

The ride back from Rocky Harbor was a silent one. Peter pulled up at the Sunnycove Playhouse. When Vicky stepped out he drove off without a word. She thought, I've got to pull myself together before I go inside.

In the foyer she sat down for a moment on one of the benches. She studied the framed photographs of the Playhouse company. Sybil Shaw's face seemed to come alive. Her eyes stared coldly at Vicky and her full lips seemed to sneer at her. With a shudder Vicky turned away and looked at Gloria Fenton's gentle features. There was reassurance in her warm, brown eyes.

Vicky got up and went into the theater. As she walked down the center aisle she saw Eric sitting on the stage. He waved to her. She hadn't known he'd been given a part but she was glad to see him.

Gloria Fenton, deep in conversation with Mr. Albert, looked up and saw Vicky. She ran down the steps to the auditorium and put her arm through Vicky's. "I'm so glad you're going to work with us," she said. They

walked up the steps together, Gloria Fenton talking all the time. "I think you'll like your part and I'm sure you can do it." She nodded toward the cast. "Do you know all these people? You've met them before, haven't you?"

Mr. Albert came over to them. "So you're having another try at it, Miss Lind," he said, smiling a little. He handed her three or four sides. "Your part's only a small one."

"It doesn't matter." Vicky found her voice. "I'm so grateful just to work with Miss Fenton."

"I'm glad your willing to work on a small part," Miss Fenton said. "Sometimes students have visionary ideas about being great actresses all at once." She turned to Mr. Albert. "Harry," she said, "tell Miss Lind about the play." After Vicky's experience with Sybil Shaw, she was relieved to notice the friendly relationship between Miss Fenton and Mr. Albert.

He pulled out a chair for Vicky and sat down next to her. "'All My Life' is the story of a woman who has made great sacrifices for her large family. You appear in the last act when Miss Fenton's—that is, Mrs. Matthews', sons and daughters have grown up. They are all very successful people. One is a congressman, another a wealthy business man, another a college president, and so forth." He paused and moistened his thin lips. "Mrs. Matthews realizes that she has educated her children to a way of living into which she can't quite fit. She knows they are trying to hide the fact that they're a little ashamed of her and she has helped them to keep up the pretense. Yet actually she has suffered a great deal from this situation. Do you follow, Miss Lind?"

Vicky nodded and he continued. "You, Miss Lind, are Margaret Tyler, a young woman with four children of your own and a politically ambitious husband. You accidentally meet Mrs. Matthews at a tea party given at her congressman son's home. In the few minutes you are together on the stage a complete bond of sympathy and understanding is established between you. And when you leave, Mrs. Matthews tells one of the servants in her son's home that she feels as if you had helped her recapture some of her lost ideals." Mr. Albert got up and looked down at Vicky. "You've got to play the part of a mother, Miss Lind, a mature woman who's had deep emotional experiences." He paused. "And we might as well be honest. I wouldn't have cast you in such a difficult role myself, but Miss Fenton wanted you. She believes you can do it." He got up and walked over to Miss Fenton.

Vicky turned eagerly to her lines. She became so absorbed she didn't look up until someone tugged at her sleeve. It was Eric. He sat down next to her.

"I didn't know you were going to be in this show," she said.

"Mr. Litchfield told me about it after lunch. The professional who was to have my part got a call from Broadway." He took Vicky's part and looked it over. "Looks pretty good," he said. "I'm one of the sons. The youngest one."

Before Vicky could answer, Mr. Albert called the cast to attention. "We'll begin reading without further delay." He nodded to Miss Fenton.

In the first scene, Mrs. Matthews was a young woman

visiting the college which two of her sons attended. She radiated vitality and the scene was a gay one. Although Miss Fenton had played the role for several years on Broadway, she went about it as if she were doing it for the first time. Vicky was so interested in watching her work she was surprised when the first act was over. They went right on to the second act, which showed the development of Mrs. Matthews and her children. Gradually they were drifting away from each other. The happiness of the early years had given way to a pride in the sons' and the daughters' accomplishments, but an uneasiness had crept into the relationship. Vicky listened to Gloria Fenton's expressive voice show the mental change in her attitude toward her children.

At the end of the second act, Miss Fenton threw down her part. "Let's all stand up and stretch for a while," she said.

Eric and Vicky walked out into the foyer. "How did I do?" asked Eric.

"You were fine," said Vicky. "Only you read a little faster than usual."

"I know," said Eric. "I had a hard time getting myself out of the way."

"It's always like that at first," said Vicky. "I don't dare think about my part or I start shaking. I'll be glad when the next act is over."

Vicky learned in the next few days what it was to work in the theater. Gloria Fenton kept herself and her cast going until there was not a drop of energy to be drained from anyone. She did not stay aloof the way

Sybil Shaw did. When she was not needed on the stage she sat down in the auditorium with the others. Her favorite pastime was knitting, but her eyes followed every move on the stage while her needles clicked.

The moment she walked on the stage, Miss Fenton became to Vicky the perfect example of what an actress should be. Each day she brought fresh inspiration to the character of Mrs. Matthews. That lady became a living person, a continuously unfolding character. It was impossible to believe that Gloria Fenton had played the part through two seasons on Broadway and many times on the road. She was enthusiastic about the other parts too, and perfectly willing to give someone else the limelight. Once she said to Mr. Albert, "You're giving Mrs. Matthews too much prominence here. It's her youngest son who's important." And Eric moved upstage while Gloria Fenton moved down to the position of lesser importance. A kinship sprang up between her and the cast and they called each other by their play names off stage as well as on.

During rest periods she would often sit with Vicky and Eric. "Reach over in my knitting bag and pull out a bar of chocolate," she would say to Eric. Then, sharing the candy with them, she'd talk about the theater.

"I was so shy," she told them once, "that it was almost a disease. My voice was weak, too." Her knitting needles clicked while she seemed to be remembering those days. "But I wanted to act. Not just enjoy the glamour of being an actress, you see. But to interpret life to other people through the theater. So I kept at it."

Another time Gloria Fenton told them: "The only

function of an actress or an actor is to get the playwright's idea over to the audience. Self-exhibitionism is out. Self-effacement isn't right either. No, that's impossible. You use the best in yourself to bring out the best in the character and in doing it you sort of glorify both yourself and the character."

"The theater's a universal language," she said on another day. "If the play's a good one, if it says something worth while, the audience and the actors merge into one. Man becomes more than a little fragment in a vast universe outside himself. He gets a glimpse of truth, of the universal brotherhood of man. If any art is worth its salt, it gives you that."

To Vicky this was the most stimulating experience of the summer. She jotted down on the back of an envelope the things Gloria Fenton said and every night, tired though she was, she wrote them to Gus.

In one of the letters she mentioned Peter. "Perhaps I should have told you about the boy I met, Gus. He's not one of the students." She paused, making spiral doodles on a blank sheet of paper. She could tell Gus his name anyway. "His name is Peter Bradford. His people have been sailors and shipbuilders for generations." She couldn't tell him the things that were really important about Peter, the perfect way he did everything, his voice that was always calm no matter how excited everyone else was, how he looked when he was hoisting the sails on the *Vicky* or turning the wheel of his roadster or teasing Seaweed, how fond you got of him because he was always so natural.

"He's been teaching me to swim this summer. I'm not

very good yet but anyway I'm not afraid of the water." She covered a whole fresh sheet with doodles before she wrote the next sentence. "He's named his boat after me. The *Vicky*. It's a sloop." There, that sounded business-like and unsentimental, putting "It's a sloop," at the end.

She folded the letter and put it in the envelope, thinking all the time about Peter. The last time she'd seen him, the day they'd gone to Rocky Harbor, they'd almost quarreled. She hadn't been able to go down to the steamboat dock since then. Evenings she got back from rehearsals so late that she and Eric usually had dinner alone on the dining porch. And apparently Peter didn't want to see her any more. He had called her hard. He had said she was as hard as Donna Russell.

But at rehearsals while she was waiting her turn to go on, she spent her time daydreaming about him. Peter was a dashing sea captain like one of his great-grandfathers. He would capture her from a boat on which she was sailing with her father, who was a rival captain. She wore a white, flowing gown, and her hair was like Donna's, yellow and beautiful and hanging to her shoulders. Every time she tried to get inside the character of Margaret Tyler, she found herself dreaming instead about Peter.

Friday came and she still had no feeling for the part of Margaret Tyler. After dinner that night she got up and hurried out of the Inn, walking along the bypaths and lanes of Sunnycove in the quiet darkness. She felt the heat more than she had all summer. Every sound irritated her—the slamming of a door, the shrill call of a mother to her child, the whistle of a man she passed, the

starting up of a car half a block away. And the katydid, the persistent katydid! If she could, she would have struck at them, silencing their grating chorus.

She stayed out as late as she dared and even then it was physical exhaustion that drove her back to the Inn. In her room once more she looked down at the part of Margaret Tyler lying on her desk. Margaret Tyler. She said the name over and over, hoping that it would help to push Peter Bradford out of her mind. What was Margaret Tyler like? What was her background? What made her click? She thought, I'll work this out tonight. I'll stay up all night if necessary.

She sat down and tried. Margaret Tyler was only a name, the name of a woman in a play. It didn't mean a thing. She closed her eyes and tried to see Margaret Tyler. Instead she saw a deeply tanned face topped by thick hair the color of bleached straw. It was a nice face with a sharp jaw line, with blue eyes that met you in an honest, questioning stare, a face that was warm and handsome when the large mouth spread into a smile.

She threw the part away from her. "How can I think about Margaret Tyler with such important things happening to me?" she cried out. "What do I care about Margaret Tyler and her four children and her husband who wants a career in politics?"

She pounded the desk with her fist. "He had no right to name his boat after me," she cried. "He had no right to teach me to swim and to take me out to Rocky Harbor and tell me about how he played pirates there. He had no right to let me find out so much about him if he didn't care anything about me."

The morning after the dress rehearsal of "All My Life," Vicky waked up painfully aware that she would much rather go back to sleep. Twisting her neck, she stared out at the gray dawn. Most mornings she liked to lie a few minutes drinking in the freshness of Sunnycove, feeling a security and peace she had never known at Pittstown. Today, however, she would not have felt secure anywhere.

She lay there, going back over every minute detail of the dress rehearsal. It had lasted until one-thirty.

Vicky and Eric had sat together in the auditorium and wondered how Miss Fenton could be so relaxed. "I'm so nervous I can hardly sit still," Eric had blurted out.

Vicky hadn't been nervous. She would have been glad if she had been. At least that would have been a sign that she cared about Margaret Tyler and the play. She was letter perfect in her lines and she had rehearsed all her business until she could have done it in her sleep. She knew exactly where to sit, when to stand up, when to move two feet forward, when to lift her hand, when

to lean forward and look eager, when to sound excited, when to slump back upon the couch. She could do everything, do it perfectly and without one jot of feeling about any of it. Not once during the week of rehearsals had she felt that extra spark that would have transformed her from a puppet into an actress.

Eric knew it and had talked it over with her several times. "What's the matter, Vicky? Snap out of it," he would say. Mr. Albert knew it. "If you really think the part is too much for you, Miss Lind," he had said in his soft voice, "it isn't too late to say so. I've felt from the beginning it was too difficult a part for a student."

Worst of all, Gloria Fenton knew it. "Margaret Tyler," she had said lightly, "what are you afraid of? You've got as much talent as any professional. Loosen up and let yourself go."

Last night Vicky had gone through the dress rehearsal in front of all the other students, doing a mediocre piece of work which would have made her feel deep shame a few weeks before. But she hadn't cared. She hadn't cared about anything.

This morning she still didn't care. It was funny about life, the way things changed. When she had come here to Sunnycove, all that mattered was to get ahead with her acting. Now all that mattered was that she might never see Peter Bradford again.

Almost exhausted from a week of overwork, she pulled herself up to a sitting position and stuffed the pillow behind her. The gray dawn had given way to a bright summer day. The Inn began to wake up. Water ran in the room next door, there were heavy footsteps on the

bare boards overhead, a radio commentator blared forth the morning news. Then Miss Sniff was out on the porch and her voice came up to Vicky. "Josie," she called through the downstairs windows, "Miss Fenton wants breakfast in her room at noon. She'll sleep late." Vicky listened to the breakfast menu for Miss Fenton—fresh blueberries with cream, cereal, broiled sausages, wheat cakes with plenty of maple syrup, and a pot of coffee. "She eats a hearty breakfast and then doesn't eat again till after the play. She always does that on opening night."

Opening night. The words slapped Vicky awake. She took her soap and towel and went down the hall to the bathroom. She turned on both faucets and let the water rush into the tub. Even now it didn't seem quite real that she could have all the water she wanted. In summer her brothers were glad to get a basin apiece. But that was in Pittstown.

It was a long time since she had thought about Pittstown. She tried to remember it, but nothing would take definite shape. What difference does it make? she thought. I'll always remember Gus, of course. After all he's done for me how could I forget him?

Suddenly, in a flash of realization, she answered her own question. But that's just what you *have* done. You're thinking so much about Peter Bradford that you've completely forgotten Gus and all he taught you.

A panic seized her. "I've got to get it back," she said.

She hurried to her room and quickly pulled on her clothes and combed her hair. Then she ran down the stairs, out on the porch, and on down the walk. She

knew what she was going to do. Nothing would stop her now. Not Peter nor the inner numbness that had crippled her all week. The sense of exhaustion had left her. She raised her head and drew in deep breaths of the fresh morning air.

Her meadow had changed since the last time she had been there, but only a little. The grass had been recently cut and a fine stubble lay over the ground. Black-eyed Susans had replaced the pink and white clover, but the Queen Anne's lace was still there. Throwing herself down on the ground, she let her face sink into the stubble. Margaret Tyler. She must think about Margaret Tyler.

Gradually Margaret Tyler came into Vicky's mind, the way one meets a new friend and learns just a bit about her at each encounter. Margaret was slender and pretty. It didn't matter in the least that Vicky herself was not pretty; it was how she felt that counted.

Margaret shared a two-family house with another young married couple. She had decorated her home herself and her taste ran to dainty, feminine furnishings—ruffled curtains, flower and bird prints on the walls, graceful furniture that was not too heavy, colors that were light and cheerful. She liked her kitchen neat and orderly, with not a thing, even a pot holder, out of place. She drove a car and enjoyed doing her own marketing, early in the day before the stores were crowded.

Next Vicky filled in Margaret's background. She came from a wealthy family and had attended one of the finest private schools in the country. She could ride and play tennis and golf. Since she'd been married she

missed her closetful of pretty clothes, the abundance of spending money, the theater and concerts she had taken so much for granted.

Nevertheless Margaret was passionately devoted to her children. Vicky lived through a day with her, going the round of her duties, helping her take care of the children, bathing the baby and watching the way he tried to eat the soap and chew on the washcloth, brushing his hair into ringlets and feeling so proud that it was naturally curly.

She mended clothes with her, sat down while she took dictation from her husband and then typed his letters, went into the kitchen with Margaret and helped her prepare the veal casserole for supper. No, Margaret would call it dinner. And in the evening she stood at Margaret's shoulder while Margaret read to the children, a story about a lovely lonely princess to the older ones and a story about a little red hen to the younger one. Then she helped Margaret put them to bed, laughing and playing with them, hearing them say their prayers, kissing them good night.

Vicky was too busy to think about time or being hungry. Once she deliberately tried to think about Peter, but Margaret was at her elbow saying, "And now I want to tell you about the time my husband and I went away on the only vacation we've had since we've been married." And Peter Bradford wasn't there any more.

Occasionally Vicky looked up to see where the sun was. When it finally reached the rooster weather vane on the farmhouse, she got up and brushed the stubble from her skirt. She thought, I've got to get back now.

S U N N Y C O V E

There's just enough time to pick out a dress for Margaret Tyler. A dress the shade of a ripe melon. The blue one I wore at the dress rehearsal last night is all wrong.

She stepped over a cluster of black-eyed Susans and headed back to Sunnycove.

The side doors of the Playhouse scraped as the ushers threw them open for the intermission. Vicky drew back closer to the wall of the building so that none of the audience would see her. After Mr. Albert had checked her costume and make-up, she had come out here on the back porch of the Playhouse to wait for her turn to go on.

The crowd noisily pushed toward the covered wagon.

"Hello, there." She looked up. Eric stepped out upon the porch. "So that's where you've been hiding."

She was sorry he had found her, but she moved over to make room for him. He patted his make-up carefully with a clean white handkerchief. "As usual," he said, "it's boiling hot under the lights."

"How's it going?" she asked.

"Fine. Miss Fenton is marvelous." Vicky nodded. They were quiet, listening to the voices and the katyids. "Where were you at dinner time?"

"I didn't eat," she said. She hoped he wouldn't ask her anything else. She didn't want to tell him about

today, about finding Margaret Tyler at last. She wanted to surprise them all.

"Then you didn't hear about Donna?" he asked.

She thought, What do I care about Donna? I've already heard enough about her.

Eric went on. "She had a telephone call this afternoon. Her screen tests were successful. New Century wanted her to go right out to Hollywood." Eric patted his face again with the handkerchief. "She's had news from the doctors, too. They can do a plastic surgery job later, so her face will be all right. But of course she can't go to Hollywood now. She had a bad case of hysterics when the telephone call came." He shook his head. "Not that she ever stirred any sympathy in me, but you've got to admit she's had a bad break."

Vicky got up. She thought, If I start thinking about Donna, I'll lose Margaret Tyler. I mustn't let Donna spoil my acting.

The cowbell rang. "Mr. Albert will be looking for me," she said. Eric walked in with her and turned toward the men's dressing rooms while she went to the stage. She wished Eric hadn't told her about Donna.

The property crew hurried about the stage, straightening the pictures on the walls, the doilies on the tables, making sure all the furniture was on spike. Buff and Frank Fowler looked up from the braces they were tightening. "Good luck, Vicky," Frank said. Buff winked broadly and made a clicking sound between his teeth. It was his way of saying he was rooting for her.

The door of the set was open and Vicky looked out upon the stage. Miss Fenton in her white wig and plum-

colored dress sat back comfortably in a big wing chair. She looked like a nice elderly lady. Except for the expressive brown eyes, you'd never have recognized her at all. Mr. Albert was talking to her. His voice was low, but the walls of the set carried it out to where Vicky stood.

"You'll have to cover up that scene with the Lind girl," he said.

Miss Fenton straightened the antimacassar on the arm of her chair. "I expected her to come through before this," she said. "That girl has talent. I can't understand what's happened."

"She hasn't the background," Mr. Albert said. "You know she's lived in a mining town all her life. I honestly think she can't grasp what it means to live in a world like Margaret Tyler's. She's out of her depth."

"I still think I'm right about her," Miss Fenton said. "She's the best student the Playhouse ever had. I think something's bothering her."

Mr. Albert shrugged his shoulders and turned toward the door. Vicky pressed herself between a tall chiffonier and one of the flats so he wouldn't see her. The stage manager gave a signal. The lights went up and the curtain parted.

So I'm not able to do it because I come from Pittstown, she thought. So that's it. She was so angry she could hardly follow the lines. Miss Fenton's voice, old and tired, came back to her but she didn't hear a word. Mr. Albert patted her on the shoulder. "You're on in a few minutes," he said.

"I know," she said hoarsely.

She faced the door of the set. Yes, I *can* do it, she thought. I can be Margaret Tyler even if I do come from Pittstown. I'll go out there and show him I can.

If she didn't calm down, she'd lose her breath control and her voice would go to pieces. She mustn't let that happen. She breathed deeply as Gus had taught her.

It was almost time for her to go on. There, Miss Fenton was alone on the stage. She was walking over to the mantel over which hung the portrait of her oldest son. It was Vicky's cue. Putting her hand on the knob, she gripped it so tightly she couldn't open the door. She relaxed her grasp and opened it gently as she was supposed to do. Then she peeked out upon the stage. Only it wasn't the stage. It was a room in the Matthews' house.

Mrs. Matthews turned to greet her. "Hello. Come in, my dear. Don't be afraid of me. I won't bite."

For a moment Vicky thought she was talking to her, the lines were so appropriate. She walked across the stage. "I . . . I . . ." She stammered her first line as she was supposed to do. Miss Fenton's hand reached out and lightly touched the sleeve of Vicky's dress. Her eyes searched Vicky's and suddenly they were not Gloria Fenton's any more, but the eyes of a spunky old lady, Mrs. Matthews. That look established the necessary bond between them. Vicky Lind disappeared and Margaret Tyler came very much alive.

Mrs. Matthews said, "You're surprised to see me. I don't look as if I quite belong here, do I?"

When they laughed and sat down on the couch together, it seemed as if they were doing it for the first time, as if Margaret Tyler had walked in here and found

the little old lady and now they were getting to know each other. They sat there talking about their children as if they weren't people in a play at all. They were just two women, one a very old one who was speaking from the depths of experience, a bit sadly, and the other a young one, eager to please, overworked, pouring out her heart to a sympathetic ear. When Margaret Tyler got up to go, it seemed as if she were leaving an old friend. Mrs. Matthews walked over to the door with her. "Now you go home with a smile on your face and don't let that husband of yours down. And do come and see me again soon."

"I'd love to if you'll let me," she said. Mrs. Matthews patted her on the arm and Margaret Tyler walked out.

It took Vicky a moment or two to realize that she was backstage at the Sunnycove Playhouse and that all the people standing around her were members of the cast. One of them grabbed her hand and a voice said, "You were swell!" She blinked as she realized it was one of the professionals. And what was that noise out in the auditorium? It was applause.

"What are they clapping for?" she asked.

"For you." It was the same professional.

"For me?" she exclaimed.

"You were good."

Someone patted her on the back. She turned and looked at Eric. "Nice going, Vicky," he said.

Mr. Albert pushed Eric aside and said a little nervously, "Very nice work, Miss Lind. Very nice."

She started back to the dressing room. Eric stopped

her. "There'll be a curtain call," he said. "You'd better hang around."

He held her hand while she waited. It seemed ages before the curtain swung closed on the tag line. Then they were all out on the stage and she was bowing and smiling with the rest of them. The moment the curtain closed, she broke from the line and ran to her dressing room.

A little lightheaded from so much praise, she stared into the mirror. Her make-up was streaked with perspiration, her lipstick had smeared. She would be glad to get it off. As she reached for the jar of cold cream the door opened. Gloria Fenton stood there. She had snatched off her wig and unbuttoned the front of her high-necked dress. The heavy hollows etched upon her face by make-up liners were in sharp contrast to her dark hair. Her eyes were her own now, young, shining.

She came up to Vicky and put out her hands. Vicky looked at them. On the stage she had not noticed the heavy make-up which had been applied to those hands to make them look wrinkled and old. Miss Fenton gripped Vicky's hands in hers and drew her close in a hug. "Congratulations!" she said. "I couldn't have done better myself. Not a bit better, Victoria Lind."



The trail of perfume which Miss Fenton had left behind her filled the whole dressing room. Vicky was too excited to take off her make-up and costume. Walking over to the window, she stood there thinking of the wonderful letter she would write to Gus.

The last of the theatergoers were getting into their cars and the parking attendants shouted directions to them.

Inside Vicky there stirred a feeling of incompleteness. She thought, That's silly. Why, this is the very moment I've been waiting for all summer! A sharp rap on the door startled her. "Anybody in there?" It was the stage manager, Mr. Marsh.

She jumped up and opened the door. "I'm sorry," she said. "I . . . I must have forgotten what time it was. I'll change right away."

He pushed his old felt hat back on his head. "Congratulations! You did a swell job tonight, Miss Lind."

"Thanks, Mr. Marsh," Vicky said, pleased because she

knew that he had had long experience himself on the stage and in vaudeville.

"Yessir," he said, "I seen a lot of them come and go here at the Playhouse. Been here fifteen summers now." He leaned against the side of the door and scratched his forehead. "Most of this young talent doesn't cut much ice with me. I've seen too much of it peter out."

Vicky thought, Just some more hard-boiled show talk. His next sentence surprised her.

"I watched you pretty close tonight, Miss Lind. There's just something about the way you walk on the stage. Not many of them got it nowadays. Whenever a new actress gets a break here, I watch her. It's kind of a game with me. If she's good enough to bring me down from the flies, I know she's got it." He pulled his hat forward again. "Tonight I was waiting in the wings when you came off. We got little enough real talent on the stage nowadays. You keep plugging, Miss Lind. You got that extra something that gets over. Conviction, I call it."

It was almost too much to have Mr. Marsh talk to her like this after everything else. "I'll change right away," Vicky said.

"I'll be down on the stage. You give me the high sign when you're going."

Vicky closed the door and quickly smeared cold cream over her face. She wiped it off and pulled her costume over her head. She'd have to take it back to the Inn and press it before tomorrow night's performance. When she was dressed, she put out the lights and called, "I'm leaving, Mr. Marsh."

His answering "O.K." resounded through the whole building.

The houses of Captain's Lane were ghostly shadows in the darkness. Only a dim night light showed here and there in an upstairs window. It was strange the way that feeling of incompleteness hung on. She didn't feel happy at all. She thought, Maybe it's just because I'm so hungry.

When she reached the Inn, Joan was on the porch waiting for her. She jumped up and ran halfway down the walk, exclaiming, "Oh, Vicky, Vicky, you were marvelous. You're an actress. You really are!"

Vicky mumbled, "Thank you." Joan linked her arm through Vicky's as they walked up the steps.

"Everyone was talking about you. A man in front of me said to his wife, 'Who is that girl? She's fine.' And I leaned forward and said, 'Excuse me. She's a friend of mine,' and boy, was I proud!"

"I'm hungry," Vicky said.

They went to the kitchen and found some tuna fish salad, bread and butter, and milk. Joan perched on one of the stools.

"I thought you walked over to the mantel too fast when you first came in," she said.

"I know," said Vicky. "I'll watch it tomorrow night."

Joan waited while Vicky finished her salad. "Did you hear about Donna?" she asked.

"About her screen tests?" Joan nodded. "Eric told me." Vicky took her plate and glass to the sink and washed them.

Joan said, "I wonder why Peter Bradford left before the show was over tonight."

Vicky almost dropped the plate. "Was Peter there?"

"Yes. I tried to watch his face while you were on the stage, but I got so interested in you I forgot about him. When I looked over, he was walking up the aisle."

Vicky reached for the dish towel and dried the dishes. Why hadn't Peter come back to see her? It was the least he could have done.

"Let's go," she said.

As they passed Donna's door a thin stream of light poured out through the crack at the bottom. Joan whispered, "She's probably too upset to sleep." Joan stopped at her own door. "I don't like Donna Russell but I can't help feeling sorry for her. Imagine coming that close to getting what you want and losing it!"

Vicky walked down the hall. She didn't want to talk about Donna. Inside her room, she went directly to the bed and pulled down the white spread. Everyone else felt sorry for Donna. What was the matter with her that she couldn't?

She dropped the spread. Suddenly she cried out, "Why, I hate Donna Russell!" That's what it was. All summer she had kept her dislike carefully hidden beneath the surface but it had been there all the time.

Peter had realized it. He had tried to get her to do something constructive about it when he asked her to talk to Donna. But she had refused. No wonder Peter had called her hard. No wonder he hadn't come back to see her tonight after the play.

She sat down on the bed. Well, it didn't make any

difference now. Anyway, why should she care? Donna didn't deserve any better than she was getting. Vicky thought of Gus. Many times he could have felt the same way about the people in the valley. But he didn't. He had tried to show her again and again that you couldn't be happy if you didn't care what happened to other people. She clasped her hands tightly together in an agony of indecision. Suddenly she got up and went to the door.

The thin stream of light still trickled out from under Donna's door. With her hand raised to knock, Vicky paused. It was the hardest thing she had ever done. Then she brought her knuckles down sharply against the wood.

"Who is it?" Donna's voice was muffled. Vicky hesitated so long that Donna cautiously opened the door and peeked around it. "Oh, you." She sounded surprised. She started to close the door and stopped. "What do you want?" she asked suspiciously.

"Can't I come in?" Vicky asked.

Donna shrugged her shoulders with indifference. Standing back, she jerked her head toward the room. Vicky stepped inside and closed the door. She tried not to look at the bandages on Donna's face.

It was a few moments before Vicky spoke. Then she said, "I came because I wanted to talk to you. I'd like to help you if I can."

If Donna had snarled at her, told her to get her business over with and get out, Vicky wouldn't have been surprised. But this was a new Donna, whose head and shoulders drooped, whose hands hung listlessly at her sides. The very atmosphere of the room seemed to have caught something of Donna's gloom.

Donna walked over to the window and pulled up the shade. She stared morosely into the dark street. It was plain she wasn't at all interested in anything Vicky had to say. When she spoke her voice was bitter. "I've shifted for myself a long time," she said. "I don't need anyone to help me now."

Suddenly Vicky saw something that had been invisible before. She saw Julia Blararik, the little girl who had been brought up in the Bohemian section of New York, who had fought for everything, for enough clothes to wear, enough food to eat.

Then all at once Vicky was talking to Donna. "If I've learned one thing this summer, it's that no one's strong enough not to need help sometimes. I've certainly needed it. There were two or three times when I'd have given up if someone hadn't helped me."

Donna turned on Vicky. "Who's giving up?"

"You are. And there's no reason to. Your face is going to be all right again. You'll get another chance at Hollywood. But not if you give up. Why don't you act normal? Go downstairs tomorrow instead of brooding up here. You've got to get your thoughts off yourself and your troubles."

Donna slumped on the bed. "Get my thoughts off my troubles? That's a laugh. My face isn't ever going to be the same again."

Vicky sat down next to her. "You know that's not true." She leaned forward. "I think you're afraid."

Donna looked up at her. "What do you mean by that?"

"You'd much rather stay up here and feel sorry for

yourself than go downstairs and face the crowd. You, the girl who threw so much weight around here early in the summer. Oh, sure, you were going into the movies. Nothing would stop you. You talked pretty big when things were going your way."

Donna stood up. Her shoulders were back and her fists were clenched.

Vicky thought, That's a good sign. She went on, driving her points home with all the power of her expressive voice. "But now that you've had your first tough break you're ready to back down. You're afraid. Afraid to have people look at the bandages on your face." She stood up and faced Donna. "The longer you put it off the worse it's going to be."

There was something of the old Donna in her voice when she answered. "You wouldn't talk so big if you were looking out from behind a wad of bandages, Bernhardt."

Vicky found Donna's eyes amidst the swathes of white gauze. "I've had to look out from behind something a lot worse than a wad of bandages," she said quietly. "All my life I've looked out from a plain face that didn't have any bandages on it." Donna unclenched her fists and listened attentively. "To make matters worse, I had to choose a profession where a face means so much." She walked closer to Donna. "And I'm going to have the same face all my life. It won't be any different when a wad of bandages comes off."

Donna looked down at the braided rug beside her bed. Her eyes followed round and round the rings of color

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as if doing that would help her grasp the meaning of what Vicky had said.

Vicky went to the door. Her hand was on the knob when Donna's voice shot out and stopped her as effectively as a twist of the arm. "Why did you come here to talk to me tonight, Bernhardt? We've never been especially fond of each other."

Vicky took hold of the shiny doorknob. "That's something I'll let you figure out for yourself," she said. She opened the door and went out.



Donna came down to meals and attended classes at the workshop after that. Although she was different from her lively self, shunning the crowd as much as she had formerly wanted them, at least she was acting more normal. All that week Vicky watched her, feeling an inner satisfaction that it had been she who had brought Donna downstairs.

Vicky could not be so cheerful, however, about Peter. It seemed almost as if he were deliberately avoiding her. She was glad that she was kept so busy between the workshop and the Playhouse. It helped, although it couldn't keep her from thinking.

With Donna no longer playing the role of recluse, the gossip swung to Sybil Shaw. "Noontide," her final play of the season, was in rehearsal. The plan was to take it to New York in the fall. Bit parts had gone to Jack Trent and Susan Howard. They brought back from the rehearsals vivid stories of Sybil's antics. This time her quarrels were with Collins Hunt, the playwright. Miss Shaw didn't like the play. Every rehearsal was inter-

rupted many times while she argued about the story or the dialogue and demanded that the author rewrite scene after scene. Collins Hunt, a seasoned Broadway man who knew his theater inside out, refused most of Miss Shaw's demands. He often thundered back at her across the apron with a vehemence that infuriated the star and tickled the cast. Jack and Susan had already lost count of the number of times Miss Shaw had threatened to walk out. So far, Mr. Albert had been able to pour oil on the troubled waters, but no one was sure how long his influence and patience would last. One day Vicky had a chance to talk with Susan about Miss Shaw and "Noontide." "What's the matter with the play?" Vicky asked.

"Nothing, really," said Susan. "I heard Mr. Albert call it one of the best Collins Hunt has ever written."

"Then why doesn't Sybil Shaw like it?"

"She wants something custom-made for her. So she can show off her clothes and personality. This play's a comedy, but it's got depth. Frankly, I don't think Sybil Shaw has the stuff to put over the character of Iris Courtenay."

On Thursday morning when Vicky reached the workshop she was told to report immediately to the Playhouse. Mr. Albert had sent for her. As she crossed the lawn between the two barns, she wondered what he wanted. She was sure it had nothing to do with her performance in "All My Life." The audience had responded to her all week and there had been that burst of applause every time she walked off.

Mr. Albert was waiting for her in the office of the Playhouse. Two men were with him. He said, "Miss

Lind, I'd like you to meet Mr. Schooley and Mr. Reed. They're producing a play this season. They saw you last night in 'All My Life.' "

Vicky liked Mr. Reed at once. He was slender and self-contained. After shyly nodding to her he kept his eyes on the leather portfolio in his lap. Mr. Schooley sat forward in his chair and watched Vicky from close-set eyes sunken in a round, flabby face. His plump hands polished the arms of his chair. She watched the hands, fascinated.

"Your name is Victoria Lind," he said. His voice was unpleasantly high and thin for such a huge man. His tone, however, made it clear that his power was not to be measured by his voice. "What experience have you had?"

Vicky hesitated. "None," she said, "except here at Sunnycove. 'All My Life' is my first professional play."

Mr. Reed looked up for the first time. "But you're giving a fine performance," he said. "There's a quality about it that reminds me of someone I've seen before. You must have studied somewhere, Miss Lind."

"My brother Gus . . ."

Mr. Schooley interrupted her. "It doesn't matter where she studied," he said. "I've seen graduates of a half-dozen dramatic schools who couldn't act for peanuts."

Mr. Reed said, "I'd like to try Miss Lind in the part we have in mind, Jim." Vicky looked at Mr. Schooley. The way he twisted in his chair warned her that he didn't agree with his partner.

"Miss Lind," he said, "I'm going to be frank with you.

You're giving an acceptable performance in 'All My Life.' " He leaned far back in the chair and, closing one of his small eyes, squinted at Vicky with the other. "Miss Fenton is very enthusiastic about you. She thinks you have talent." He stroked his double chin with his right hand. "Talent's a big-sounding word, but it doesn't mean much. This country's full of talented youngsters who want to act. Most of them come to New York. They pound the pavements and wind up jerking soda or selling imitation lace handkerchiefs in the five-and-tens." He lurched forward. "Mr. Reed and I did have you in mind for a part. But, as I said, I'll be frank, Miss Lind. Talent isn't enough. We need a beautiful girl for this part and you haven't even the average amount of good looks for the stage." He slumped back again. "I'd think twice before I wasted any more of my time, Miss Lind. Maybe you can go back home and teach dramatics in the high school."

Mr. Reed got up and laid his portfolio on the chair. "I agree with Miss Fenton," he said shyly. "I think you have an extraordinary amount of talent, Miss Lind." He put out his hand and she placed hers in it. "While you've been standing there, I've suddenly realized who it was you reminded me of last night. It was Miss Gish. Miss Lillian Gish. When you walked out on the stage in that orange-pink dress, there was the same wistfulness, the same delicacy." He dropped Vicky's hand. "I'm sorry Mr. Schooley doesn't agree with me."

Mr. Schooley didn't say anything. He stared down at the floor as if he hadn't heard what Mr. Reed said.

On Thursday afternoon the worst heat wave of the season arrived, wrapping Sunnycove in a blanket of humid air and sapping the vitality from everything. Glassy and still under the scorching rays of the sun, the river gave no comfort. Not a breeze stirred anywhere and the sailboats lay listlessly at anchor, looking as if they would never stir again.

It was a tribute to Gloria Fenton's acting that "All My Life" played to a good house on Thursday evening. Vicky wondered how Miss Fenton managed to carry her exacting part through those two and a half hours of stifling heat, and with the same freshness and vigor as always.

Friday morning brought no relief. Vicky went down to breakfast because she couldn't sleep and her room was hot. Enid Cooper, Renee Larue, and Joan were the only other girls there. Eric looked cool and composed as always, but she couldn't help feeling sorry for big Frank Fowler, who, in tennis shorts and a thin shirt, sat munching toast and mopping up the perspiration. Skinny little

Buff came in, pulled out his chair with gusto, rubbed his hands, and shouted to Josie to bring him three eggs, bacon, a double orange juice, a pint of milk, and plenty of toast.

Eric and Frank groaned. Joan called over, "Buff, I think you're disgusting to eat all that in this weather."

"You're just jealous," he shouted back as he helped himself to a piece of Frank's toast.

Joan sighed. "It's too hot even to think, much less eat."

Vicky drank the rest of her orange juice. It wasn't too hot for her to think. She had been doing plenty of thinking since yesterday, since Mr. Schooley had made such a gash in her hopes. Mr. Reed had been nice, but there were more Mr. Schooleys in show business. Before she had come to Sunnycove, she had asked Gus about her looks, had asked him bluntly, because it was the question uppermost in her mind. He had told her that beauty was something inside you and that if you had it, looks, one way or the other, didn't count. He'd assured her that the people who really mattered could tell about this inner kind of beauty. But Mr. Schooley mattered. It was all right for Gus to talk the way he did behind a schoolroom desk. Schoolteachers could talk about the world the way it ought to be. But when you got out in it and rubbed elbows with people like Mr. Schooley, it was different. Most people judged by what they could see and hear and touch. They didn't care about the kind of beauty you carried around inside you.

Joan nudged her. "I wonder what Mr. Johnston

wants," she said. Vicky looked up and saw him in the doorway. "He's looking at you," Joan said.

Mr. Johnston called her name. She put down her napkin and got up. He said, "Good morning, Miss Lind," and led the way out into the hallway. She thought, Now what have I done?

He walked over to Miss Sniff's office and stood aside for her to enter. Miss Fenton sat behind the desk directly under the large photograph of herself. "Hello, Margaret Tyler," she said. It made Vicky a little easier to hear Miss Fenton call her familiarly by her play name. "Sit down," she said.

Vicky sat very straight, almost stiffly, waiting for them to speak. Although the well-shaded office was cooler than the dining porch, she perspired with uneasiness.

"You tell her, Fred," Miss Fenton said to Mr. Johnston. He stood by one of the files, leaning his elbow on it.

"Miss Shaw left Sunnycove last night," he said. "So far as we know, she's flown to the coast." He tapped his fingers on the metal file, making a little tune. "Not that we were greatly surprised. Miss Shaw has been threatening to walk out ever since we began 'Noontide.'"

Vicky thought, What has that to do with me? Why call me in at nine-thirty in the morning to tell me about Sybil Shaw's latest tantrum?

Miss Fenton jumped up and went over to Mr. Johnston. "Go ahead and tell her," she said, laughingly. "Can't you see she's on pins and needles?"

"We've decided to let you play Miss Shaw's part." He looked at Miss Fenton. "At least, Miss Fenton decided and talked the rest of us into it."

Vicky got up. It couldn't be true. She went back over the words to be sure of what she had heard. "We've decided to let you play Miss Shaw's part." No, she couldn't have heard him say that. Why, only yesterday Mr. Schooley had told her she'd never make good on the stage. Mr. Schooley knew about such things. He'd been in the business a long time.

"We want you to know we don't intend to take you to Broadway in 'Noontide,'" Mr. Johnston said. "I think it's only fair to tell you, Miss Lind." He stared frankly into her eyes. "We couldn't get any star to fill in here at Sunnycove this week and there's no one in the professional group who's got the stuff to handle the part." He looked at Miss Fenton. "We don't want to close the Playhouse next week since the house is sold out."

Vicky's throat was furry. "You mean, you mean I'm going to play the lead—the *lead*—in 'Noontide' for a whole week?"

"Yes, that's it. You'll have to work very hard over the week end. It's a big job but it can be done. I think you should be very grateful to Miss Fenton."

Certainly she should be grateful to Miss Fenton, and she was. She should be saying something to her, something fine and big, something that showed what she felt, but she couldn't think of a single thing.

"There's just one other matter," Mr. Johnston said. He stared down at the gold linked band on his watch as if he suddenly found it unusually interesting. "We'll have to do something about your hair. I've suggested a wig, a reddish blonde wig that will approximate Miss Shaw's coloring. And we'll have our dresser, Charlotte,

try Miss Shaw's costumes on you, alter them to your size." Mr. Johnston was very casual about the way he said the next sentence, almost too casual. "By the way, it might not be a bad idea to get Alberto up from New York. You haven't had much experience with make-up, Miss Lind, and Alberto is one of the best make-up artists in the country."

Vicky didn't like the idea of the wig and Alberto. But she was so happy to get the part that if he had asked her to paint her nose purple and dye her hair green, she would have done it.

Mr. Johnston said, "I've called special rehearsals for this afternoon, all day tomorrow, and Sunday. We'll have the dress rehearsal Monday." He straightened his tie. "I think you'll be ready by Monday night. We're not worried. Miss Fenton says you're a quick study." He picked up a sheaf of papers from the desk. "Here's the part," he said. "You go off by yourself and do as much as you can with it this morning." He glanced at Miss Fenton. "I think that's the best way to start, don't you, Gloria?"

"Yes," she said. "Miss Lind knows how to get the most out of a part. She works it out subjectively. She's done a marvelous job with Margaret Tyler."

"That's fine," he said. "Please be at the Playhouse at one. We'll start rehearsals then."

She took the part and walked over to the door. She would write Gus right away, even if it was only a page, to tell him about it. She'd send it air mail and special delivery. Maybe he'd get it by tomorrow. No, she'd do better than that. She'd send him a telegram! It would

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be the first telegram she had sent in her life and she would have to scrape the bottom of her pocketbook to find enough to pay for it.

She stopped and turned toward Mr. Johnston and Miss Fenton. "I'm sorry," she said. "I almost forgot to say thank you."

It was strange how unimportant the normal things like eating and sleeping could become. That week end Vicky lived at the Playhouse, having a bowl of soup, a sandwich, or a glass of milk whenever she could. Dawn would find her awake, studying the character of Iris Courtenay, going over the action of the previous rehearsal, or memorizing one of the longer, more difficult speeches.

The record-breaking heat wave had already forced itself into the news headlines. No matter how often Vicky changed her clothes she could not keep them dry. Yet hunger, fatigue, the sticky discomfort of damp clothing did not bother her, she was so absorbed in what she was doing.

The rest of the cast seemed glad to be rid of Miss Shaw. They entered into the extra rehearsals with friendly willingness. That was a help. They were patient while Vicky learned the routine business, and even fed her the lines when she floundered.

"Noontide" was the story of Iris Courtenay, a society

girl whose husband suddenly learns that the inheritance he expected to receive has dwindled away. All that's left for them is a factory in a little mill town and the only way he can save that is by going back there to live. To Iris this is a terrific blow. But she loves her husband enough to insist on going with him. At first she makes many serious mistakes. Gradually, however, she manages to win the trust of the mill workers by her honesty and understanding. The play reaches a climax when labor troubles threaten the very life of the factory and Iris Courtenay saves the business.

The playwright had treated the part of Iris with humor and mellowness, but under the gentle irony there was a deep current of seriousness. In the first act Iris Courtenay could be played two ways. She could be interpreted objectively, drawing every ounce of self-pity from the situation. Or she could be played on a lower key, with a lightness of heart which showed that Iris was determined to save her husband any unnecessary pain, that she would go to the mill town and take her own joy and happiness with her. That was the way Vicky decided to work out the part.

Vicky soon learned, however, that she was not going to be allowed to play Iris Courtenay subjectively as she wanted to. It was intended to be Sybil Shaw's play and Iris Courtenay had been her part. The red-gold wig ordered for Vicky was merely a symptom of what Mr. Johnston was thinking. He wanted Vicky to play the part the way Sybil Shaw would have done it.

Mr. Albert, who cared less about the box office than Mr. Johnston did, might have given Vicky a chance to

do it her own way. But whenever he turned around there was Mr. Johnston, watching the play with shrewd eyes and nervously tapping fingers. The line of his jaw and the tautness of his body said plainly that the audience had paid good money to see Sybil Shaw and if they couldn't see her, they'd see the best imitation he could get for them.

Vicky didn't blame Mr. Albert for not resisting the manager. He was a good director but he didn't want his reputation hurt by a student who, he felt, shouldn't have been given the part in the first place.

Vicky understood their point of view but it didn't make her feel any better. Inside she battled constantly against being an imitation of Sybil Shaw. She was sure that if they would let her play the part her own way, she could win over the audience on opening night. She felt that Collins Hunt, the author, would have sided with her, too. Her Iris Courtenay was his Iris Courtenay. However, the day after Sybil Shaw left Sunnycove, Collins Hunt had gone back to New York in complete disgust.

Vicky thought of talking it over with Gloria Fenton. But she couldn't go to her and complain. After all, what right had she to stand up against Mr. Johnston and Mr. Albert?

So Vicky let them try to put into her voice the sensuous quality that characterized Sybil Shaw's. She let them teach her all Miss Shaw's tricks—the gestures, the walk, the poses. Because of her natural gift for mimicry she succeeded to a large extent. The members of the cast complimented her. "You're almost as good as Miss

Shaw," they said. As the work progressed Mr. Albert became less tense. Mr. Johnston grew easier, too. Vicky was the only unhappy one. It was all wrong. It wasn't Iris Courtenay.

When the wig arrived from New York, they took time out from rehearsals while Vicky tried it on. She sat before the mirror of the dressing table in the star's room and looked at her reflection. She hated the wig. How could she forget herself with that red-gold mane of hair flying around her face, getting into her eyes?

Then they brought in Alberto. He propped a portrait of Sybil Shaw against the mirror and set down his little black bag. From it he took a half-dozen jars of foundation cream in different shades. He studied Vicky's face as an artist would a bad picture he wanted to improve. He smeared and rubbed and blended until Vicky wanted to reach out and toss all his shiny black and silver jars on the floor. When he had finished with the foundation he rubbed gold shadow on her eyelids. He arched her eyebrows in the haughty curve that distinguished Sybil Shaw's. He smoothed gold-red rouge into her cheeks and painted a new mouth over her own, a bigger one, full and moist. At last he pulled out a strip of false eyelashes and glued them in place with spirit gum. Vicky was so ashamed she wanted to hide her face in her hands. "It's not Iris Courtenay at all," she wailed to Alberto.

Very pleased with himself, he smiled at her. "But it is a little like Miss Shaw, isn't it? Quite a little," he said. Vicky wanted to cry.

Charlotte, the dresser, had her turn with Vicky, too. She came into the dressing room and looked Vicky up

and down with the appraising eye of the expert fitter. Thumping down her basket of pins, she went to the closet and shoved the costumes along the rod.

"It's a great honor for a young girl," she said pleasantly. "Any girl in the world would give a year of her life to step into these dresses that were intended for Miss Sybil Shaw."

There were two evening gowns, an apricot bengaline that was exactly the shade of Sybil's hair and a stiff bronze brocaded satin with a low cut and formal lines. The afternoon dress was a heavy corded silk in a deep terra cotta that highlighted Sybil's coloring. The suit was brown velvet trimmed with mink and the hat was a brown velvet calot with ostrich feathers and a long beige veil that would have accentuated the delicate texture of Miss Shaw's skin. There were bronze sandals in the Grecian style, slippers to match the apricot gown, and brown suède pumps. There were brown velvet gloves embroidered in gold thread and shoulder-length gloves in bronze lamé. And there was a fur evening wrap.

"What's it called?" Vicky asked, running her hand over the smooth curly fur.

"Russian broadtail," said Charlotte in a low, hushed voice that implied it was something very special. "Miss Shaw's clothes are furnished by Ninon's for program credit," Charlotte explained. She took the apricot bengaline from the hanger and shook it out. "We'll try this one first," she said. "For size."

Vicky took off her blouse and skirt. Charlotte slipped the dress over her head and pulled it expertly into place. Vicky walked over to the mirror. Behind her, she saw

Charlotte reach for the basket of pins. The dress was all wrong. Iris Courtenay would never wear this dress in the mill town to which she was going with her husband.

Vicky knew it wouldn't do any good but she asked the question anyway. "Do I have to wear these clothes?"

Charlotte almost swallowed the pins she was pressing between her lips. Her eyes rolled wide open.

"I don't like this dress," Vicky said. "Iris Courtenay would never wear it."

Charlotte's face lighted up with understanding. She came over to Vicky and patted her twice on the shoulder. "You're tired," she said. "They've been working you too hard."

Vicky thought, What's the use of fighting? I'll have to wear the clothes anyway. She stood rigidly still while Charlotte raised the shoulders.

"It will have to be nipped in at the waist, too," she said. Vicky studied her in the mirror. It was fascinating to watch her talk with those pins in her mouth and never swallow one of them. "I'll raise the hem last. Miss Shaw's a tall woman. But I don't think the alterations will be too much of a job, Miss Lind." She reached out for another handful of pins and stuffed them into her mouth. "You've got a pretty figure even if you . . ." She pressed her lips tightly over the row of pins. She had almost let her tongue slip that time. She had almost said, "Even if you haven't got a pretty face."

Vicky pressed her hands to her forehead and tried to remember what she must do next. She was so tired she couldn't think. It seemed as if the dress rehearsal had

been going on for days, although it could not have been more than three or four hours. Charlotte's voice brought her back. "Miss Lind, you must go out soon. You had better put the wig back on now." She came over and gently sat Vicky down before the dressing table. "Never mind, it will be over soon. This is the last act, Miss Lind."

Vicky mentally repeated Charlotte's words. It will be over soon. This is the last act. It will be over soon. No, it won't, she thought. Tonight is opening night. I've got to face the audience. And I hate the play. I hate Mr. Johnston and Mr. Albert. And I'm so tired I'll scream if anyone tells me to do another thing I don't want to.

It was the inner rebellion that had worn her out, the constant fighting with them mentally that frayed her nerves. She thought, I'll snap up the next one who crosses me. If Charlotte suggests that I powder my face, I'll grab the can of powder and turn it upside down on the floor.

No, Charlotte wouldn't cross her. She'd just stand there and keep on infuriating Vicky with that soothing, sticky voice of hers. She was surprised at how calmly she sat there and let Charlotte adjust the wig. That was the trouble. She needed to get rid of some of the steam she'd been storing up. It wasn't healthy to stuff it all inside her.

When Charlotte laid down the brush for the last time, Vicky stood up. "Just a moment, Miss Lind." Charlotte reached over and straightened the strap on the bronze

satin gown. "It's such a lovely dress, Miss Lind. Wear it proudly now," she said.

I won't wear it proudly, Vicky thought. I'll hate it. I'll hate it because it's all wrong. She walked out into the dimly lighted corridor and turned toward the stage. Someone was huddled against the wall. She didn't even look.

A voice stopped her. "Hello, Miss Lind."

She blinked, trying to make out who it was. "Mr. Marsh?" she asked.

"I've been wanting to say something to you, Miss Lind. Ever since you came into this show, I've been wanting to say it. And now I can't hold it back any longer." She was almost too tired to hear, certainly too tired to care about what Mr. Marsh wanted to say. "Why don't you ask them to let you play this part the way you want to, Miss Lind? And if they won't, why don't you just go ahead and do it anyway?"

It was too dark for her to see his face. But his words were like neon signs blazing in her consciousness. *Why don't you play this part the way you want to, Miss Lind?* He went on. "You're not fooling anyone who knows show business, Miss Lind. You're not Sybil Shaw. You got more real ability in your little finger than she ever had in her whole trunkful of fancy clothes." He gripped her shoulder and for a moment it seemed as if he were going to shake her. "Wake up, Miss Lind. Don't let them push you around."

A stagehand came toward them and Mr. Marsh went down the hall whistling to himself. When she reached

the stage, Mr. Albert and Mr. Johnston stood at the apron, talking to the electricians.

Mr. Johnston said, "You'll have to dim the lights in this scene. Use orange gelatins with that bronze gown. Make it look like golden moonlight on black water."

Vicky's stomach turned over. Golden moonlight on black water! It was disgusting. Iris Courtenay was crying out to be allowed to come through all this make-believe. They should be caring about her, not about making a dress look like golden moonlight. She leaned against a chair, tired and sick of the whole business.

"Do you want a drink of water, Miss Lind?" It was Mr. Albert. She shook her head and walked over to the imitation alabaster mantel in the Courtenay living room. This would have been a magnificent scene for the real Iris Courtenay if she were permitted to be here. The setting was a dinner party to be given for the leaders among the mill workers. It was an important dinner, one that would decide the fate of the Courtenay business. Her husband had been unsuccessfully trying to reach an agreement with his men. Iris had persuaded him to invite the men and their wives here to dinner.

Sybil Shaw had chosen this bronze gown for the occasion. Everyone said it was a masterpiece of design, a triumph in fabric and workmanship. There was only one thing wrong with it. Iris Courtenay would never have worn it at the dinner party for her husband's employees. She would have dressed with careful simplicity. She would never have worn a bronze satin brocaded gown that could be made to look like golden moonlight on dark water.

The cast took their places off stage. Vicky looked out through the archway of the set and caught a glimpse of pastel evening dresses. Those were the mill workers' wives. Mr. Albert signaled off stage and the curtain closed. She took a deep breath and tried to remember her first line. It had something to do with what they were serving for dinner. When she reached out for the line and couldn't find it, she wasn't frightened. The line would come, she had learned that much. Now she had it. "I've ordered a turkey dinner."

The off-stage noises faded out. The floods went on, dimmed by orange gelatins. With the curtain closed, the heat on the stage was unbearable. The radio promised a break late this afternoon. Thunder showers and cooler. That would be a help tonight.

This was the last act. When it was over she could go back to the Inn and sleep for a few hours if she wanted to. Only she wouldn't want to. She would be too edgy. No, she would not go back to her hot room. She would go somewhere else. Not to her meadow either. It would be too hot there, too. But she must go somewhere. She must get away from all these people. She had to be alone for a while. The curtain swished open. Thunder showers and cooler. What was her line? Thunder showers and cooler. No, that was the weather report.

"I've ordered a turkey dinner." That was her line. She turned toward the door and waited for Iris Courtenay's husband to enter.

Late that afternoon the thunderstorm broke.

Vicky had been wandering aimlessly about the village streets, and hurried into the empty Playhouse when the rain began.

She went into her dressing room and opened the closet where the row of dresses hung. One by one, she shoved them along the rod. Charlotte had said she should be proud to wear them. Slamming the door, she turned her back on the closet only to find the apricot bengaline staring her in the face. Freshly pressed, it hung on the coat rack ready for her to wear in the first act. And the wig stood on a hatstand on the dresser. She put it on and looked at herself. "I can't wear it," she said. "I can't."

She heard brakes screeching outside. Running over to the window she peered through the darkness. A delivery truck had stopped in front of the theater. The driver got out, took something from the truck, and ran up the walk, jumping over the puddles of water. He banged on the front door.

When she opened it, he squinted at her from under the visor of his cap. "Miss Lind?"

"Yes," she said.

He thrust a florist's box into her hand. "Over at the Inn they told me you might be here," he said. "Please sign." He held out a card and she took the pencil from him. "Bad storm," he said. She watched him jump over the fallen branches and puddles as he ran back to the truck. Then she closed the door and walked through the dark corridor to her room.

Who had sent her flowers? Peter? No, that was out of the question. He'd forgotten all about her. Eric and Joan? Maybe. They'd be likely to do something like that. She put down the box and carefully untied the ribbon. Lifting the lid, she unwrapped a layer of green tissue. The flowers were white. White roses. She picked up the bouquet and a streamer of white ribbons fell across her hand. Gus! She tore open the envelope. The card said, "To one of America's Great Actresses. I'll be with you tonight."

I'll be with you tonight. He didn't mean he'd be here in Sunnycove. He meant he'd be with her in spirit. She walked down the hall to the storage room and found a big vase. In one of the washrooms she filled it with water and carried it back to the dressing room.

She put the bouquet in the vase and stood there looking at it. In a rush of feeling Gus and all he had taught her came back. It was almost as if she were standing in the little one-room school in Pittstown, listening to his voice.

"A young actress must take plenty of direction,

Vicky. She mustn't get swell-headed and think she knows more than anyone else. But there may be times when you believe the director is wrong. If that happens, try your best to do what he wants. Take his direction and try to adapt it to your own interpretation of the part. But if you really can't make it work, if you're sure you're right, then there's only one thing to do."

She walked over to the bouquet and leaned over it, drawing in the fragrance of the white roses. Gus's voice was positive, insistent.

"You've got to do it the right way then. Even if you're taking a big risk. Even if that risk is your own career. Nothing is more important than your honest convictions, Vicky. Nothing! And remember, Vicky, you'll never convince an audience if you're not convinced yourself."

She ran to the door. Suddenly she knew what she was going to do. It had come to her with the swiftness of one of the flashes of lightning outside the window.

She found a man's raincoat backstage. It was too big to put on, but she threw it around her shoulders. Over her head she tied the old kerchief she used as a headband when making up. She started for the front door and turned back. She must take the wig with her. Snatching it up from the dressing table, she looked for something to put it in. Her eyes fell upon the empty florist's box that had held Gus's flowers. Throwing the wig in, she slammed on the lid and put the box under her arm.

It was raining harder than she had expected. Keeping her head down, she ran across the lawn. The workshop door was locked. But a locked door wasn't going to stop

her now. She ran around the building trying all the low windows. At last she found one that was open. She pushed it up, scrambled over the sill, and dropped to the floor. In the wardrobe room she switched on one of the smaller lights. If she had too much light, someone might come over to investigate. No one must find her here. She put the box down on a chair and tossed the raincoat and kerchief on top of it. The room was damp and musty and the rain beat steadily upon the wooden roof. She rubbed her hands together, trying to get some of the clammy cold out of them. But her face was hot, feverishly hot with the excitement of what she intended to do.

There was not much time and she had to select the costumes carefully. She went over to the row of evening dresses first. Because there would be no time for alterations the costumes would have to fit. Holding her breath, she went down the line of dresses. One after another she discarded them. This one was too short, that one too long; the color of that embroidered georgette was good, but the material and the lines were too fussy. She stopped before a rose-beige crepe. There, that was the dress for the last act. Iris would wear it at the dinner party for the mill workers. She took it off the hanger and tried it on. The fit was good but it was a little too big through the waist. She'd have to wear a belt with it. Among the accessories she found one made of gold kid that would do. Suddenly she thought of the orange gelatins. They'd turn the rose-beige to a sickish yellow. Well, she couldn't worry about that now. When the time came, she'd think of something to do.

Among the afternoon dresses she found a green one

that would be appropriate for the second act. It fitted well, too. A tailored suit presented more of a problem. It had to fit perfectly. You couldn't adjust it to your figure with a belt. What about the tan covert she had worn in "Paris, Good-by"? It was the kind of thing Iris Courtenay would wear and the size was right. When she found it, she was relieved to see that it would not need pressing. Quickly she rummaged for brown gloves. The size didn't matter, she just carried them anyway. The brown hat took a little longer. So did the shoes. She decided to wear the same evening slippers with both dresses. The evening dresses were long and would cover them. Piling the costumes up on a shelf, she looked for something to protect them from the rain. Several empty cartons were shoved over in a corner. She pulled one out and carefully laid the clothes in it.

All I need now, she thought, is a dinner dress for the first act. But that's the most important of all. It will set the mood of Iris's character.

She went back to the evening dresses and started all over again. In the whole row of dresses there wasn't a thing she could use. Would she have to wear the apricot bengaline after all? Then she remembered the receiving closet. Clothes that came in were left there until someone could sort them out and decide what to do with them. There might, there just might be something there. She walked over and opened the door. The dresses were jammed in. Some were even lying on the floor. She stooped down and turned them over. No, not a thing. Suddenly she caught sight of a rich red-purple sticking out from the dresses at the side of the closet. Purple, that

was the color she wanted! The color of power! Maybe it wasn't a dress at all. She breathed hard as she pulled it out. It was a dress all right, a simple evening gown of canton crepe. Excitedly she pulled it over her head. Her fingers trembled as she smoothed it down across her hips. She wheeled around and looked in the mirror. It was just right. The dress was beautifully simple and under the lights the color would be softer. It was the perfect dress for the first act. Power and simplicity. That was Iris Courtenay.

She put the dress in the box with the others and got into her own clothes. As she picked up the raincoat she saw the florist's box. She had almost forgotten about the wig. She would have to hide it until the play was over. If she didn't, they might make her wear it. She went over to a bin containing flowers and ribbons. Scooping them out, she threw the box in the bottom and spread the flowers and ribbons over it.

With the carton in her arms she walked through the workshop theater to the back door. She unlocked it and stepped out on the porch. The rain had stopped and the sun was trying to break through. It was much cooler and the air was heavy with the fragrance of wet bushes and flowers. She started down the steps and stopped. She had just thought of something—the other members of the cast. In her excitement she had forgotten all about them. She couldn't spring this complete change of make-up and costumes on them without warning. It was against all the rules of the theater. But she couldn't stop now. Iris Courtenay was like a prisoner inside her, pounding at

the doors, demanding to be let out. No, she had to go through with it.

She went on down the steps and across the lawn. Mr. Marsh might help her. He knew how she felt about Iris Courtenay and she was sure he could be trusted.

Vicky sat down at the dressing table and tied her make-up band around her head. She would keep her make-up simple. A light coat of pale juvenile grease paint, just enough rouge to highlight her face, lipstick, a touch of brown eyeshadow and a tiny bit of cosmetic on her lashes. While she worked, she glanced over at the bouquet at the end of the dressing table. She had the feeling that Gus was really going to be in the audience tonight. It couldn't happen and yet she felt it was happening. It was as if he were getting closer every moment. She tried to tell herself how silly it was. If Gus were coming to Sunnycove, he would have sent more than just that message on the florist's card. He would have telegraphed or telephoned.

The electric clock on the dressing table had stopped during the storm, so Vicky had no way of knowing the exact time. One thing was on her side, she would be on the stage at the curtain. All she had to do was time her actions so perfectly that she would arrive just as the curtain was ready to go up. But that was a large order! If

she showed herself a few minutes too soon, Mr. Albert would make her go back and put on the apricot bengaline. That's where she would have to depend on Mr. Marsh. If he refused to do what she asked, she might have to give up the whole idea.

Then there were Charlotte and Alberto to worry about. They would be coming in soon. If Mr. Marsh didn't check the cast before Charlotte and Alberto got here, she didn't know what she would do.

She dipped the large puff into the powder box and pressed it gently over her face and neck. The camel's hair brush tickled as she removed the excess powder. She was breaking a fresh piece of cosmetique into the pan when someone knocked on the door.

"You in there, Miss Lind?" She moved back her chair and jumped to her feet. It was Mr. Marsh checking them in. She unlocked the door and opened it.

"Come in a minute," she whispered. He pushed his hat back on his head and stepped past her into the room. She locked the door.

"Mr. Marsh," she said, "I'm going to ask a big favor of you." He looked at her with no sign of response. "You asked me the other night why I didn't play Iris Courtenay my own way." Still his face didn't change expression. "Well, I've decided to do just that. I'm not going out there tonight and give a bad imitation of Sybil Shaw."

Not a muscle twitched in his face. She went on. "I've picked an entirely new set of costumes from the wardrobe in the workshop. The kind Iris Courtenay would wear. And I'm not going to wear the wig." Mr.

Marsh made no answer. She thought, I was wrong about him, I guess. He isn't going to help me, after all.

He moved toward the door and she thought he was going to unlock it and go out, but instead he leaned back against it and faced her. "Just what do you want me to do, Miss Lind?" he asked. His voice was casual, but she thought she recognized a note of reassurance in it.

"Two things," she said quickly. "Everything depends on my staying here until curtain time. I can't show myself a minute before. If I do, they'll make me change. Could you call me at the very last possible moment, just rap on the door and say O. K.?"

"What's the other thing?"

"Someone's got to let the rest of the cast know what I've done. I can't spring a complete change of costumes and acting on them on opening night." In her earnestness she walked over and grabbed his arm. "If you could tell the cast what I'm doing. Just in time, not a moment too soon. If you could tell them I'm playing Iris Courtenay the way she should be played, I . . . I feel somehow they'd understand." She paused. He didn't say he would and he didn't say he wouldn't. He just stood there shuffling the call cards in his hand. She let go of his elbow. "If it's too much to ask you," she said, "if you wouldn't want to help me . . ."

He pulled his hat over his eyes and then shoved it farther back than before. "I was just thinking," he said, "if a fuse was to blow at the last minute. If it happened accidental-on-purpose, it would cause quite a commotion. And if no one knew just which fuse it was, it might bring Mr. Albert and Mr. Johnston up in the flies.

You know how it is backstage, if something like that happens at the last minute people kind of lose their heads. They don't notice whether someone's wearing a purple dress or a peach-colored one. They don't notice whether the leading lady's got red hair or brown."

She was holding on to him with both hands now. She wanted to say something to him, to let him know how much she appreciated what he was going to do for her, but as usual she couldn't find the words. Reaching over, she pulled one of the white roses from Gus's bouquet and stuck the long stem through one of the holes in his old sweater.

"That Charlotte and Alberto," he said. "Have you thought about them?"

"Yes," she said. "I . . . I don't know what I'm going to do."

He walked over to the dressing table, pulled a pin from the pincushion, and fastened the white rose more securely to his sweater. "I just saw them in the storeroom," he said, looking down at the rose. "They were setting up the card table for a quiet game between the acts." He walked over to the door. "Now if someone should just happen to snap the lock on the storeroom door and it should close, by itself you understand, very quietly . . ." He raised his hands, palms up. "That's a soundproof room," he said thoughtfully. "I don't think no matter how loud anyone hollered you could hear them."

She said, "Why, Mr. Marsh, you wouldn't think of doing a thing like that."

He took off his hat and scratched the top of his head.

"No-o-o," he said. "I guess I wouldn't." But just the way he said it made Vicky sure he would.

Vicky leaned against the door and held her ear close to the crack. Twice she put her hand to the key, thinking the footsteps she heard were Mr. Marsh's, but whoever it was went by. She had been waiting so long, she thought he'd forgotten her. Maybe his plan hadn't worked out the way he expected it to. She tightened at the thought. No, he wouldn't forget. And nothing had happened. It was just this long wait that had made her tense.

She sat down in an armchair and tried to relax. It was impossible. Another step came along the hall and she was instantly out of the chair, but the person passed by the door.

Suppose she was wrong about this whole thing. Suppose she had made a mistake about the character of Iris Courtenay. She hadn't talked it over with anyone. She had simply gone ahead on her own and worked the part out as she always did, feeling first the flood of inspiration and then working, working, working until she had absorbed every tiniest detail of the character. But with her other parts she had always been able to try out her ideas on the rest of the cast, to let the character grow in relation to the others, to benefit from the director's perspective and the trial and error of rehearsal.

For the first time the bigness of what she was doing confronted her. She shrank from it. What about the other members of the cast? Even if Mr. Marsh told them, could they readjust their performances so quickly?

Would they want to do it? And even if they did, what right had she to expect it of them? Standing before the apricot bengaline, she had a sudden violent notion to tear off the purple dress and get into it. She thought, The apricot dress won't be any good without the wig. And I can't get that. It's too late.

Pulled and wrenched by doubt, she gripped the shoulders of the dress between her hands. If she were wrong about Iris Courtenay, she would spoil her career once and for all. On every producer's list she would go down as the girl who had done that dreadful thing at the Sunnycove Playhouse—the girl who had gone out on opening night and played the part the way she thought it ought to be played. On opening night, imagine! She took the whole show into her own hands. It was a terrific flop. She had the cast so mixed up they could hardly get through the play. Look at her picture. She isn't even pretty. You'd think she would have been so glad to get the part she would have done what they told her to do. No, you don't want to have anything to do with her. She's dynamite.

Yet if she were right . . . if she were right! She heard steps again. This time it was Mr. Marsh, she was sure. She could almost see through the door, see him lifting his hand to knock, looking up and down the corridor to be sure it was clear. She glanced at the bouquet on the table and her eyes fell on Gus's card standing propped up against the vase.

Mr. Marsh's rap was soft but it made her jump. She ran over and turned the key. His eyes were fastened alertly on the far end of the corridor. "O. K.," he whis-

pered. "But hurry." She touched his arm lightly and turned toward the stage. Holding up her long skirt, she ran the full length of the corridor. In the flies Mr. Albert and Mr. Johnston were talking with the electricians. Then Mr. Marsh came along and took the iron steps two at a time. He was going to show them what the trouble was, to discover the fuse just as if he hadn't known about it all along. Hurrying past the rest of the cast, she walked out on the stage. Her heart pounded and she couldn't seem to get her breath. She was afraid she was going to pieces right here on the stage. Then suddenly she felt something, something she couldn't put into words. Gus was out there! Yes, he was, out in the audience. It was an intuition so strong that it seemed to come to her through her senses like the sound of a voice, the pungency of a perfume, or the brush of a hand. She felt the strength, the power, and the assurance that were so much a part of Gus. He had meant it when he said he would be with her tonight. He was really here.

The pounding inside her stopped and a sense of peace and quietness flooded through her. Why, this was only a room, Iris Courtenay's hotel room. Fearlessly she stepped over to the trunk that she was supposed to be packing as the curtain opened. The voices off stage didn't bother her now, even though they were talking about her. "She's on the stage. I saw her go out." It was Vicky Lind they were talking about and she didn't have to worry about Vicky Lind, not for a few hours anyway. Maybe afterwards, when it was all over, she would think about Vicky Lind again. But not now.

Backstage voices, low and controlled, talked all around her, but she kept her poise. "The switchboard's working

all right. Dim those lights." "No, don't dim them." "Why not? The cue sheet says to." "Yeah, but she's changed her dress. Look, it's purple. You can't dim the lights with a purple dress. Purple needs all the floods it can get." "O. K., leave them bright. What's the matter with her, changing her dress the last minute like that?"

Vicky smiled. The voices didn't touch her. They were part of Vicky Lind's world, not Iris Courtenay's. There, she recognized that sound. They had just thrown the switch that put out the house lights. She blinked just once under the strong glare of the floods. Then she picked up a dress to pack in the trunk. The curtain opened. Her hands trembled, but in a second she had them under control. The door of the set opened and Iris's husband came in.

"Good heavens, Iris!" he said. "What's all this mess?"

She looked at him. "Don't tell me you've never seen a woman pack a trunk before," she said.

The audience laughed, comfortably, easily, the way they should. Everything was all right. It was a good audience and they liked her. It was something she could always tell after she had spoken her first line. And from the way Iris Courtenay's husband stood there, relaxed and sure of himself, she knew the cast was with her, too. She tossed him a dress and he caught it. It was part of the business but she did it with a difference, underplaying the action, giving it the light touch.

All the doubt was gone. She was sure, sure of everything. She surged with the bright expectancy of bringing Iris Courtenay to life. This was it. This was her reason for being. She could no more escape it than she could escape life itself.

Iris Courtenay said good night to the last mill worker and his wife. She turned from the door and faced her husband. They stood looking at each other for a moment. She had just saved the mill for him. The men and their wives had responded to her patience and kindness. But her husband was a stubborn man. It was not going to be easy for him to acknowledge what she had done. And now that everything was going along all right, he would want to leave the mill town.

"Iris," he said, "when you've been married to a woman for a while, you think you know her pretty well. Sometimes you even believe you can tell what she's thinking and guess what she's going to do next."

She walked around the dinner table, picking up the baskets of mints and eating some of them as she went. She put a mint into her mouth. "All right. Tell me what I'm thinking. Tell me what I'm going to do next."

"You're going to ask me to stay here and see the job through. You want me to build a new extension on the

plant, put up some new houses for the men and their families."

She walked around the table, picking up the rest of the baskets.

"For heaven's sake, Iris, stop that and say something."

She looked at him. "You're wrong about one thing," she said. "I'm not going to ask you to stay. That's something you've got to decide for yourself."

"Don't you want me to?"

She picked up another handful of mints and started to put them into her mouth. Then she tossed them away, scattering them over the table. Some of them rolled to the floor. She looked at him, saying much more, silently, than she could ever say aloud. Then she spoke. "Of course I want you to stay."

He leaped across to where she stood, seizing her with both hands and pulling her around to him so he could look into her face. "Just try and stop me," he said. "Just try."

She rested her head on his shoulder and looked up into his face. "Why should I?" she asked. The curtain swung quickly together.

The stage was suddenly filled with people. It wasn't fair. It wasn't right for them to rush out like this and spoil everything. Vicky wanted to hold on to the mood of the play a while longer, to make a slow, less painful transition from Iris Courtenay to Vicky Lind. But she was being pulled into the line that formed across the stage, into the very center with the other members of the cast at her right and left. The curtain swung open and she bowed and smiled with the rest of them. When

it closed, the applause grew louder. The others turned and walked quietly off the stage, leaving her alone with Iris Courtenay's husband. The curtain opened. Again she smiled and bowed to the darkness in front of her. The curtain closed and this time the applause gathered even more momentum. She turned to walk off the stage.

"That's for you. Go back and take your bow." She kept on walking toward the exit. She must get to her dressing room. She must find Gus.

Someone grabbed her and pulled her toward the curtain. She struggled to get free but there were others pulling and pushing her. The next thing she knew she stood there alone and the curtain was opening. The applause thundered in her ears. She smiled and bowed. The applause kept up. She smiled and bowed again.

"Good girl," someone in the audience shouted. "Keep it up!"

She felt the curtain brush against her as it closed. Quickly she started for her dressing room. Someone seized her hand. Then someone else had the other hand. They were all around her, shouting at her. "You were wonderful." "Grand performance." "Simply marvelous." "You're a genius!" Suddenly she was panicky. She wanted to get away from them. They were closing in on her, frightening her with their vehemence. She wanted to get away and find Gus.

"Let her out," someone said. "She's tired."

The crowd parted and she made her way through. She didn't look at anyone. Gus might be in the dressing room already, waiting for her, wondering why she didn't

come. She hurried down the corridor to her door. Mr. Marsh stood there.

"Congratulations, Victoria Lind." He repeated the name. "Victoria Lind. It's a name we're going to hear a lot of."

When Vicky opened the door she came face to face with Donna Russell. They looked at each other in silence.

Vicky spoke first. "Hello," she said.

Donna's voice was low and steady. "I figured I'd get here before the crowd begins to arrive."

After the broiling heat of the stage the room seemed almost chilly. Vicky went to the dressing table and snatched up her smock. She threw it around her shoulders. She was so tired she could hardly think straight. She wished Donna had picked some other time.

"What I've got to say won't take long." Donna's voice was almost gentle. "When you came here, I gave you a name. I thought it was very funny. So did a lot of others." In spite of her fatigue, Vicky turned around and listened with interest. "But tonight as I watched you act and saw what you did to the audience, well, my joke suddenly didn't seem so funny any more."

Vicky took a step toward her but Donna walked over to the door and opened it. "Good night, Bernhardt," she said. The door closed noiselessly behind her.

Vicky went over to the couch. Several boxes of flowers lay on it. She opened them. There were two bouquets from the Sunnycove Theater management and Miss Fenton. And an old-fashioned nosegay from the

workshop students. That was nice. Eric and Joan must have taken up a collection.

On the little table next to the couch was a tray covered with a gay napkin. Under it were sandwiches, a thermos of hot soup, a slice of coconut layer cake. Miss Sniff had written a note on the Skipper's Inn stationery. "Take time out to eat. You've got a long pull ahead of you, my dear."

Grabbing a sandwich, she ate it eagerly. The door opened. She turned and faced Miss Fenton and Mr. Johnston.

"You were beautiful, Victoria Lind." Miss Fenton had hold of her free hand. "There's no other word for your acting but beautiful."

Mr. Johnston shook a finger under her nose. "Young lady, I ought to give you a scolding. A big one."

She went on eating her sandwich, partly because she was hungry and partly because she didn't care. The way she felt, if he put her out of the cast, it wouldn't matter.

"What right did you have to get yourself a whole new set of costumes and throw away an expensive wig and play that part the way you did tonight?"

"I didn't throw your wig away," she said. "It's in one of the bins in the workshop wardrobe." She took another bite of her sandwich. "I laid it very carefully under some flowers and ribbons."

Miss Fenton laughed. "Mr. Johnston's only teasing," she said. "As a matter of fact, I think he's convinced at last of what I've known all along. That you're one of our most promising young actresses." Miss Fenton put

her arm through Mr. Johnston's. "Tell her, Fred. Go ahead. Tell her what you've decided."

Vicky looked from Miss Fenton's gentle face to Mr. Johnston's slightly severe one. She thought, Tell me what? Mr. Johnston coughed before he spoke. "We've decided to take the play to Broadway. We'll open sometime in October. We'll get a new cast except for the leads and . . ."

Miss Fenton interrupted him. "The author was here tonight. He's terribly excited about your performance. Says it's his Iris Courtenay, just the way he pictured her. He says you manage to get more real beauty across to an audience without benefit of long eyelashes and glamour than any actress he's seen in a long time. He says . . ."

Vicky stopped listening to what Collins Hunt had said. Gus opened the door and came in. He had on his old blue serge suit, the one he wore to Pittstown graduations every June. His hair needed cutting. It needed cutting so badly that she would have laughed if she hadn't felt so much like crying. And he had worn one of those dreadful ties his pupils gave him last Christmas. Yet he seemed to fill the whole room, to fill it and outshine everything in it, including Miss Fenton and Mr. Johnston. They turned and saw him.

"Gus," she said. "I'd like you to meet Miss Gloria Fenton and Mr. Johnston."

She smiled at him, tracing with her eyes the beloved homely features of his face. Without turning to the others, she said, "This is my brother. This is Gus."

Gus and Vicky sat down in rockers on the porch of the Inn.

"Did I tire you out?" she asked him.

"No," he said. "I enjoyed it too much to get tired." She had just taken him for a sight-seeing tour of Sunny-cove. They had visited the workshop, Edgecomb's, and the steamboat dock. Cap'n Jelly had insisted on buying a bottle of root beer and serving it in paper cups while they sat in his pew and listened to his best stories. Then she had taken Gus out to her meadow and told him how she had worked out the parts of Mary Hollister and Margaret Tyler. And now they'd come back to the Inn for dinner.

"Smells like baked beans for supper," he said.

She said, "For dinner. You must call it dinner up here."

"Excuse me!" he said. "It's baked beans, whatever you call it."

"Yes, I told Miss Sniff you'd always wanted to taste

real Yankee baked beans. With brown bread. She put them on the menu just for you."

A cream-colored roadster pulled in at the curb. Vicky jumped up. She must get Gus inside before Peter Bradford came up on the porch. She certainly wasn't going to introduce him to Gus.

"Where you going?" asked Gus.

"I . . . I think we should wash up for supper."

"Dinner," he said. He smiled. "We've got lots of time."

Peter was halfway up the walk. He had already seen them. She couldn't run away.

"Hello, Vicky," he called.

"Hello," she said. She had to answer him although it almost choked her to do it. Well, she wouldn't say another word.

Gus stood up. He looked at Peter and Peter looked at him, and both their faces lighted up with pleasure. It made Vicky furious. Peter put out his hand. "You're Gus," he said. "Cap'n Jelly just told me you were here."

They shook hands as if they liked each other. Vicky wanted to tear them apart.

"I've heard a lot about you," said Peter. "It's kind of hard to keep Vicky from talking about anything else."

"I've heard about you, too," said Gus. "Aren't you the boy who owns a sloop named the *Vicky*? And also I understand you're pretty good at teaching girls how to swim."

Peter laughed and so did Gus. Vicky thought, Peter Bradford has no right to come along and make Gus like him right away. It isn't fair.

Peter sat on the rail of the porch just like old times. "That was a good show they had at the Playhouse last night," he said. "Didn't you think so, Gus?"

Vicky thought, He has no right to call Gus by his first name. Why, I didn't even introduce them.

"Yes, it was a good show," Gus said. "The leading lady made a hit with me. What was her name?"

"Victoria Lind. I liked her too."

Vicky wanted to run away. They were terrible to talk about her as if she weren't there. They were teasing her. Peter Bradford didn't know any better, but she was certainly surprised at Gus.

"Have a chair," said Gus. "Make yourself comfortable, Peter."

Vicky tried to catch Gus's eye and shake her head at him, but he wasn't even looking at her. He was all eyes for Peter Bradford.

"I really can't stay," said Peter. "I'm shoving off for school tomorrow. I had a letter asking me to come up and help in the office before registration begins." He got up from the porch rail. "I just dropped in to see if I could have a few words with a friend of mine."

Gus shook Peter's hand again. "Well, I'm certainly glad to have met you," he said. "I've got to go inside and wash up before supper. Excuse me, I mean dinner." Before Vicky could say a word, Gus had scooted through the door and disappeared.

She didn't look at Peter Bradford. She never really wanted to look at him again. Yet her eyes played a trick on her and turned toward him.

"Want to go for a ride, Vicky?" he asked.

She certainly intended to toss her head and say no, emphatically, but her tongue was as bad as her eyes. "Maybe," she said. "If we don't go too far."

She never wanted to walk beside Peter Bradford again, but her feet were traitors, too. They carried her down the walk beside him.

He turned the car up Captain's Lane and headed out the road that led to Rocky Harbor. When they reached the grassy parking lot, he asked her if she wanted to walk out on the rocks.

"If we don't stay too long," she said. "I've got to be at the Playhouse by seven-thirty."

Rocky Harbor was brighter than the last time she had been here with Peter. The sky and the water were clear blue with no whitecaps dashing against the rocks. Peter spread a couple of blankets on the rocks and they sat down. Two sloops came around the point, racing each other. Peter watched them intently. She thought he had forgotten all about her until he turned and said, "I heard about how you went to Donna Russell, Vicky."

"How did you hear?" she asked.

"The Sunnycove Workshop grapevine," he answered, smiling.

He pulled up a piece of kelp from between the rocks and snapped the air bubbles in it. "It was a very fine thing you did, Vicky. When I heard it, I felt as if I'd found something again. Something I value very much.

"And now you're going to Broadway," he said, "and soon you'll forget all about this summer. There'll be so many new and exciting things." He grabbed her hands. "How does it feel, Vicky?"

"It makes me realize," she said slowly, "how much there is yet to do."

"But you'll do it, Vicky. You'll always be like that. You'll always carry through."

He stood up. Bending over the loose rock, he tugged at it until it came out. Vicky thought, What's he up to now?

From the wooden chest he took out the old costume jewelry and rummaged through it. He pulled something out and examined it closely. It was a second or two before Vicky could make out that it was a ring. Once white, it had deepened to a cloudy cream color. "Cap'n Jelly brought this back from one of his trips. Solid bone, worth about five cents, I guess."

He reached out and slipped it on the third finger of Vicky's right hand. It was a simple broad band carved with a flower design. "Golly," said Peter, "it actually fits. It's so small, I thought it would never go on. I'd like you to keep it. You don't have to wear it. Just keep it tucked away somewhere to remind you of the boy who named his sloop after you."

"I will *not* tuck it away," she said. "I'll wear it." She looked down at the ring. "I wish I had something I could give you, Peter Bradford. To remind you of me."

"You've already given me something." She looked up at him. "Something no one will ever be able to take away from me."

She searched Peter's clear blue eyes. "I have?" she asked.

"Yes. It's something very few people know how to give, Vicky. It's the beauty that's inside you."